ELLEN PERCY

OR

THE MEMOIRS OF AN ACTRESS

BY

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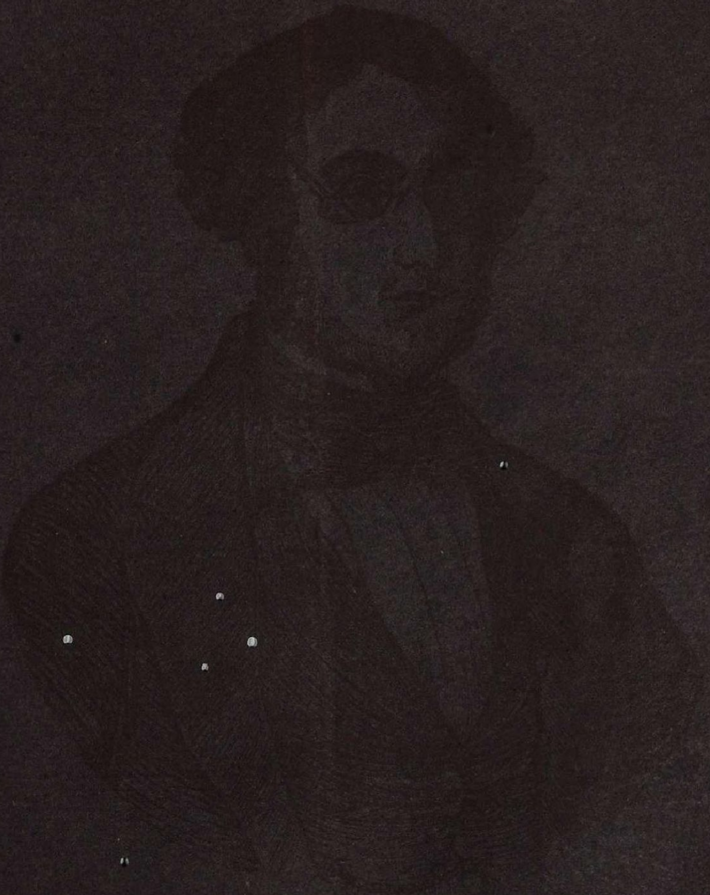

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OR THE MEMOIRS OF AN ACTRESS.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

BEDA.

On the following day, at about the hour of noon, I repaired according to promise, to Zarah's lodgings for I was not only desirous to see Beda, but I had likewise been reflecting whether through Zarah's instrumentality in some way or another, the Count of Carboni might not be brought to the understanding and recognition of his wife's innocence? Not that for an instant I deemed it possible that the Count and Beatrice could ever again live together—or that the strong loathing which the unfortunate lady naturally experienced towards her fiend-like persecutor, could ever be dispelled. But still it was important for her innocence to be recognised, so that she might be enabled to look the world in the face, and that there might not be any inconvenience in her residing with the Marquis and Marchioness of Campanella. But as for any settled plan in reference to the way in which I proposed to enlist Zarah's services—I had really none. Indeed, the idea of adopting this course at all was only as yet floating dimly and vaguely in my mind.

I reached the house in which the gipsy resided: and as I was ascending to her sitting-room, I met upon the stairs a swarthy-faced Italian, dressed in a suit of black. with a white neck-cravat, and having the air of a valet out of livery—as indeed I felt convinced that he was. He was short and slender—about thirty years of age—tolerably good-looking—yet with a certain expression of countenance which even at the very first glance I did not much like. He, however stood aside in a most respectful manner to allow me to pass; and in a few instants more I was with Zarah. I found her alone, engaged with her books; and I was somewhat disappointed at not beholding Beda there.

"She will be here presently," said Zarah, reading my thoughts; "and I have so far paved the way in furtherance of your generous design, that my grandmother will consent to part with her, in the belief that she is coming to attend

upon me. Thus if after an interview with Beda you still entertain the same idea I think there will be no difficulty in executing it."

I expressed my gratitude for the trouble that Zarah was taking in the matter: and I asked, as if quite casually, "who was that Italian, dressed in black, and with a white neckcloth, whom I have just encountered upon the stairs?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Zarah, laughing gaily: "that is the Count of Carboni's valet—for I suppose we must call his lordship by that name, since we have read it upon the card. And what do you think, my dear Miss Percy?" continued Zarah, again laughing. "that impertinent valet has had the audacity to fling tender looks at me, and to address me when we met upon the stairs. He speaks English tolerably well; for he has been in this country before—and he tells me that his master is as well acquainted with England and its language as if he were a native."

"Oh! then, I perceive, Zarah," I said, with a halfsmile, "that you have not altogether rejected the Italian valet's overtures to a little conversation?"

"He spoke so civilly and courteously," answered Zarah, "that I could not possibly cut him short without appearing downright rude and uncouth. He has a tolerable amount of conceit about him; for he took very good care to give me to understand that he was not brought up to fill a menial position—that he belongs to a good family which, however had experienced reverses—and that in fact he is a gentleman by birth. Ah! and he said more too: for he told me that during the eight or ten years he has been in his master's service, he has had opportunities of amassing a very pretty little sum of money."

"He has indeed been communicative." I observed.

"I am convinced," proceeded, Zarah, again laughing, "that the poor fellow is in love with me—and that he said all these things to prove taht there is not a very great disparity between our social positions: for of course you know, my dear Miss Percy, I pass as a sort of lady beneath this roof."

"And I suppose, Zarah," I remarked, "that you have not given him any encouragement?"

"He has not as yet been pointed enough," replied the gipsy. "to enable me to have the appearance of taking his looks or his word in a serious sense. But rest assured Miss Percy, that I am no silly coquette, fond of adulation, or capable of trifling with any one's feelings: while as for love—But no matter! *That*," added Zarah, emphatically, "is impossible!"

"And has this valet," I inquired, "spoken of his master by the name of Carboni?"

"No, responded Zarah: "and of course I have not dropped the slightest hint to the effect that I am acquainted with that secret. It is however tolerably plain that Luigi is inclined to be very communicative—"

"Luigi?" I ejaculated. "Is that man's name Luigi?"

"I have his own word for it," answered Zarah. "But why do you speak so excitedly?"

I reflected for a few moments; and then I said, "You have already seen, Zarah, that for certain reasons I have desired all possible information in respect to this Count of Carboni. I think that from everything you have just been telling me, you may perhaps render some further

service. Indeed you may possibly assist in bringing about a result which is greatly to be desired."

"You know, my dear Miss Percy," rejoined Zarah, "that you may command my services to any extent."

Again I reflected deeply. Should I tell Zarah the whole tale in respect to Beatrice? There would be no breach of confidence when the revelation was made for a good purpose: and indeed Zarah could not very well assist me without a full knowledge of all the circumstances. I therefore resolved to take her into my confidence; and in as succinct a manner as possible I related everything which concerned the Count and Countess of Carboni. Zarah listened with the profoundest interest,—with which wonderment and horror were blended when I reached the concluding particulars.

"And now," I added, "you are acquainted with the meaning of that horrible picture. You understand like-wise how important it is that the innocence of Beatrice should be made apparent;—while there can be no doubt that Luigi is a villain, who from vindictive motives, as well as to shield himself from the imputation of being the hired instrument of Angelo Marano's purpose, gave such a colouring to his own share in the drama as should confirm all the Count's suspicions against the unfortunate Beatrice."

"In such a case," observed Zarah, "there is no need to stand upon any false delicacy with regard to Luigi; and if I could only cajole him into a full confession of the truth in respect to the part he played in that fearful drama, I should be justified in adopting such means for such an end."

"Most assuredly!" I answered "Not for a single instant should we stand upon punctilios in reference to a villain of so diabolical a stamp as this Luigi!"

Zarah and myself now deliberated upon a particular plan: we settled all the details; and the gipsy promised to lose no time in carrying them out. Scarcely were our projects thus digested, when the door opened; and Beda made her appearance.

On the preceding day, be it remembered, she was plainly but neatly dressed: now there was an improvement visible in her toilet; and I at once comprehended that Zarah had, with the kindest consideration, taken care that the girl should appear before me in as respectable a style as possible. She entered the room with a light airy step—with a partial smile upon the pouting fulness of her red lips—and with beams of gaiety and pleasure dancing in her superb dark eyes. She looked even more ravishing and captivating than on the previous day: and, if possible, I felt even more deeply interested in her.

"I will leave you alone together," said Zarah, rising from her seat: "for it is time I should think of putting off this morning wrapper, and assuming a more suitable toilet for the hour of the day."

"Beda," I said, when Zarah had quitted the room, "sit down. I wish to converse with you."

The girl unhesitatingly took a chair—with no diffidence nor hardihood. She had a certain freedom and independence of spirit, characteristic of the race to which she belonged; but there was also a certain natural gracefulness, which might almost be termed a wild unstudied elegance in her movements and her action

She sat down, and fixed her large dark eyes upon me,—thus surveying me with a species of wonderment and interest, as if she thought me a very superior being, and was alike proud and pleased to be brought in contact with me.

"Do you know, Beda," I asked in the kindest tone, "why you came hither to see me to-day?"

"Zarah told me," responded Beda, whose voice was singularly musical—with almost a golden richness of tone,—"that you had spoken very generously of me, and that you wished to do something for me. She bade me mind and not tell her grandmother all this—nor indeed to mention your name to the old woman on any account. I had previously promised to serve you to the best of my power, in case I should hear of any intrigues or plots hatching against you; and I intended to keep that promise faithfully."

"You are a good girl, Beda," I answered; "and I will at once state that I have conceived a great interest in your welfare."

"I was very glad," replied Beda, "when Zarah told me that I was to meet you here to-day: for she had spoken in such high terms of you, that I already loved you. And she said too that you are so very, very clever—that you are the greatest actress in this country—and that you perform at a place where there are thousands of people gathered to behold you. So I was very much pleased to think that I should see you to-day: for I knew who you were yesterday—and I should have been delighted if you had spoken to me a single word."

All this was said with so much artless ingenuousness, so much natural candour and unstudied frankness, that it was impossible for a single instant to doubt Beda's sincerity. I had not checked her while she was speaking in so complimentary a strain in respect to myself; because I wished to hear all that she had to say, and to suffer her to say it in her own natural way.

"Should you like to live with me altogether, Beda?" I asked.

"Oh, that I should!" she joyously exclaimed: and brighter grew the beams of pleasure that were dancing in the depths of her large lustrous eyes.

"I do not mean, you know," I said, "that you are to become my companion—but to be my maid—to attend upon me—"

"I know very well," she interjected, "that I am not fit to be the equal of a beautiful and well-dressed lady such as you are: but I should like to live with you, on any terms you think fit."

"Remember, Beda," I continued, "if you come to live with me, it will be in London—you will see little of the beautiful open country—you will seldom ramble into the fields and I think I must add that if you meet any of your old acquaintances, you must not speak to them—with the exception of Zarah, whom you will often see."

"I do not care for the fields nor the open country," responded Beda, "if I can only live with you. As for my acquaintances, I know nobody but Zarah and her grandmother, and an old woman that I have been living with near Tottenham. But she used to beat me—"

"Beat you? I exclaimed, indignantly. "But perhaps," I added, in a milder tone, "you were sometimes in fault?"

"I don't know," replied Beda: "but if I happened to break some

of her wretched old crockery, she used to strike me It did not however much matter; for I always gave her a blow in return. Still I did not like that sort of life—"

"Well then, Beda," I interrupted her, "you have no acquaintances but those whom you have named; and you are not much known amongst the gipsy race?"

"I knew a great many," she replied, "when I lived with my father and mother, and we travelled about in a caravan: but they died five or six years ago—and then when I went to live with the old waman near Tottenham I lost sight of everybody I used to know; and that's why I told you I have no acquaintances now."

"What was your father, Beda?" I asked.

"A gipsy, miss," she ingenuously responded. "But he used to pride himself on never having taken anything that did not belong to him; and my mother never told fortunes. I have heard that they had some little means which died with them. Let me see?—what was it called? Oh, I recollect!—an annuity—allowed them by some very rich people, for having found their child, which some other gipsies, who were very wicked, had stolen. Do you understand me, miss?"

"Perfectly, Beda," I answered. "Do you happen to know the name of the persons who allowed your parents that money?"

"No—I never heard their name," responded Beda. "My parents were very kind to me:" and large tears gathered in superb lustrous eyes.

"And I will be very kind to you, my poor Beda," I said, caressing her clear, olive cheek. "How old are you?"

"I shall be fifteen in a few weeks," replied Beda "Do you not think I am very short for my age?"

"No—you are the proper height. And therefore it is arranged, Beda," I continued, "that you shall come to me. You will remain with Zarah to-day; and I shall come and fetch you away to-morrow. Zarah will buy you some nice clothes; and therefore you will have everything in readiness by the time I arrive. You will be with other servants at the house where I live: but you must never talk to them of Zarah, nor of her grand-mother, nor of the old woman near Tottenham; and you must contrive to say as little as possible in respect to your parents, the caravan, the annuity, the gipsies who stole the child, and everything that regards your former mode of life."

I gave Beda these injunctions in order to save her from the chance of being joked or taunted concerning her antecedents by those who would be her fellow-servants at the house in Hunter Street. She promised to remember everything I told her; and seemed overjoyed at the prospect of coming to live with me. Zarah now returned to the room; and before I left, I took the opportunity of having a little private conversation with her. I placed in her hand a sum of money, to be expended in equipping Beda with a sufficient and suitable wardrobe; so that her first appearence at the Normans' house might be as respectable as possible, and I begged Zarah to superintend all these little arrangements.

On taking my departure, I proceeded to Mivart's Hotel—where I found the Marchioness and Beatrice: but the Marquis was absent;

making final arrangements for a house which he had taken for some months. Beatrice looked better than I could have dared to hope to find her: for not only did she experience those comforts to which she had been accustomed, but her heart was considerably lightened by the circumstance that her innocence was believed by those whose good opinion she so much valued. I took an opportunity of speaking aside to the Marchioness in ths following manner:—

"I have some little project in hand, which may perhaps tend to convince the Count of Carboni of of his injured wife's innocence. Do not ask me now what it is; and say nothing to Beatrice on the subject—for we must not excite a a hope until we are confident of being enabled to fulfil it. Perhaps your ladyship will also be kind enough to request the Marquis to suspend any operations on his own side in respect to the Court of Carbom, until the result of my own proceedings be known."

The Marchioness promissed to fulfil all my instructions.—declaring that she had the fullest faith in my discretion and sagacity.

On the following day the Marquis, the Marchioness, and Beatrice removed from Mivart's Hotel to the house hired for their accommodations; and I fetched away Beda from Zarah's lodgings. I had previously told the Normans that accident had thrown me in the way of a young creature in whom I had become much interested, and that I was desirous to take her into my own special service. I entered into no further particulars: and the Normans asked me for none. When Beda was introduced to the house, they as well as their domestics were all astonished and delighted at her appearance: they were immediately interested in her; and I had now no fear that the servants would treat her unkindly,

But I will here take leave of Beda for the present, and return to that project which I had settled with Zarah, and which had so important an aim in view. A fortnight passed from the day on which that project was first initiated; and the period had now arrived when Zarah felt convinced it might be carried into effect. Accordingly, I one morning visited her at an earlier hour than usual; and as this appointment was prearranged, she was in readiness to give me immediate and stealthy admission into the house. Zarah's sitting room was separated from her bed-chamber by folding-doors: so that in either apartment any one could overhear what was taking place in the other.

"Do you think the moment is come?" I asked, as I followed her into the parlour.

"I am convinced of it," she replied, with an air of confidence. "You shall see. Luigi is out now. he will return in a quarter of an hour—and I gave him permission to come up to my apartment and sit with me a little while in discourse. I can assure you, Miss Percy, that never was infatuation so great!—and you will soon be satisfied of immensity of the power which I wield over him. He has told me, amongst other things, that his master—whom he voluntarily named as the Count of Carboni—had sustained a great and terrific calamity, which had disgusted him with the world and driven him to misanthropic habits. The Count, it appears, feels most acura-

tely what he conceives to be his dishonour; and hence the concealment of his identity beneath a feigned name—hence also the bitterness of that vindictive spirit which makes him still gloat over the fearful revenge which he wreaked."

"Did Luigi allude to his revenge in more specific terms?" I inquired.

"No," responded Zarah: "he spoke darkly of a revenge which had been wreaked—But he is coming!—the front door has just opened! Hide yourself, Miss Percy!"

I lost not a moment in retreating into the bed chamber,—the folding-doors of which I carefully closed; and then, placing my ear against them, I awaited the issue of the scene that was about to take place.

In a few minutes Luigi entered the sitting-room, and I heard Zarah greet him with a mingled courtesy and ceremony. She desired him to be seated; and I soon discovered that he spoke the English language with considerable fluency.

"This is the moment for which I have been looking forward with so much hope and anxiety!" he began, speaking with accents of tender enthusiasm.

"Stop! be not too fast!" interrupted Zarah. "It is true—and I hesitate not to confess it—that your attentions have not been lost upon me: but we have known each other for so short a time—"

"Yes!—but in a short time," cried Luigi, "persons may often come to know each other as well as after the longest acquaintance. Besides, have I not dealt frankly with you?—have I not told you exactly how I am at present situated in a pecuniary point of view—what my prospects are—"

"True!" ejaculated Zarah: "and I believe you. Yes—you have been sincere and candid! Yet there are some things concerning which I would ask you: and before I can give you any decisive response—"

"Oh! you are so handsome," exclaimed the enraptured Italian: "you know not how I love you!"

"And will you give me the proofs that I shall demand?" asked Zarah, assuming a tender tone of voice.

"Yes!—any proof," ejaculated Luigi. "You have but to speak—and Oh! I shall be delighted to give you some proof of that love with which you have inspired me!"

"Be not too sure," said Zarah emphatically. "There are times when the heart may be put to too strong a test—".

"With me it is impossible!" exclaimed Luigi. "But what means this mysterious language? There is a strange lustre shining in your eyes; and yet it is a superb light! And, Oh! those eyes of yours are so grand in their radiance—so magnificent in their splendour—that to bask in their sunshine would be bliss ineffable!"

"If you will but do something to deserve my love," said Zarah, "you shall be at liberty to address me in all these beautiful compliments; and I will listen to them. Yes; I will display all the tenderness that you can desire; and I will say to you, 'Luigi, I am thine! Thou shalt lead me to the altar!"

"Oh, thanks! a thousand thanks!" exclaimed the enraptured Italian. "What proof do you demand of me? Bid me attempt any difficult task—and I will

essay it! Bid me reveal every secret of this heart of mine—and I will confess to you as if to a sainted priest!"

"Listen to me, Luigi!" said Zarah. "For certain reasons—which I will explain to you at another time—I have vowed that to no man shall my love be ever given—no man shall my hand ever be conferred—in whose soul I have reason to believe that there are secrets treasured up. This belief I entertain of you. Do not interrupt me—but continue to listen with attention! Yes, Luigi—there are secrets in your soul—and I have partially divined them!"

"You?" ejaculated the Italian, with startled accents.

"Yes—I!" she responded. "From certain words-which have dropped from your lips at different times—words full of significancy, yet so mysterious—"

"Yes, yes—it may be so!" said Luigi, in musing accents. "When I am exited, I speak unguardedly. And Oh! to be under the influence of the spells of your beauty—to be infatuated as I am infatuated with your loveliness—"

"Suffer me to proceed." interrupted Zarah. "Not only from words which you yourself have let drop, but likewise fron certain mutterings I accidentally overheard on the part of your master, the Count of Carboni—"

"Well, well," said Luigi, tremuluos with suspense. "And those words—"

"Point to the reading of a fearful secret," continued Zarah. "And what is more—But now I am giving you a proof of confidence—I have seen that fearful picture in the Count's chamber!"

"Ah! I remember' interjected Luigi, "that when you and I have been conversing together, I have dropped allusions to the deadly vengeance which the Count wreaked in a certain quarter. But I did not think that I spoke so plainly—"

"Luigi!" exclaimed Zarah, assuming an impassioned tone; "I care not what part you may have played in that tremendous drama: I care not to what an extent you may have participated in its horrors! No—for all this I care not! But what I *do* care for, is that you should keep a single secret from me! Frankly do I declare that if you have been guilty of crimes: the fact would make no difference in what I might feel towards you, but I must know them! Nothing must be hidden from me! I would not wed a man over whose countenance I knew that there was a mask: I would sooner see that countenance revealed, even though it were one impressed with the sinister traces of crime!"

"Inscrutable being that you are!" murmured the infatuated Luigi; "your words fill me with a strange bewilderment. Yet, Oh! the tones of your voice—your looks—"

"Deal frankly with me, Luigi, and I am thine!"—and Zarah admirably suited her accents to the part which she was performing. "Confess, Luigi, that to obtain this hold which you possess over your master, you did something—you were guilty of some deep duplicity—perhaps you yourself, for your own reasons, aided to bring about the catastrophe. If so—and if it were for revenge, I could admire you!"

"Ah, this promise which you now hold out?" exclaimed the Italian, in rapturous triumph. "Yes, yes!—it was through revenge! At

the same time that the Count wreaked *his* revenge, I wreaked *mine*. And now admire me, my well-beloved!—admire me!"

"Oh, I admire you, Luigi!" cried Zarah, in a tone which for its enthusiasm seemed to emulate his own "Proceed:—tell me all this—secure my admiration; for I know that one who can avenge terribly, can love devotedly. All passions should be in extreme—"

"And mine are!" ejaculated Luigi. "It was my master's wife—the Countess of Carboni—she spurned my services when I would have rendered them—she menaced me with betrayal to my lord, and with consequent dismissal: she scorned the humble Luigi as an agent and assistant and I was avenged—Oh, I was terribly avenged!"

"And you were right!" exclaimed Zarah. "The more you tell me the more I admire you. Yes—I love a fervid disposition such as yours! But proceed, Luigi!—tell me how you accomplished your vengeance?"

"The Countess of Carboni was beloved by another—his name was Angelo Marano. He sought me one evening—he told me that he had met the Countess in the neighbouring grove—but that she had indignantly bidden him depart. He was utterly unprepared for such a reception: his spirit was chafed—while the spectacle of her enchanting beauty had fired his passions. He swore to possess her! He put a heavy bribe into my hand, and demanded my co-operation. In the neighbouring cottage of a labourer he penned a billet,—of which I became the bearer to Countess. Methought, from all that he told me of their post love, that she would relent upon perusing it, and that she would yield to the prayer which it contained. But she indignantly burnt it without scanning its contents. Then was it that she overwhelmed me with reproaches, and vowed on my lord's return that she would explain my whole conduct, What was I to do?"

"You had two courses to adopt," exclaimed Zarah boldly; "you had to ensure your own safety in respect to your master, and to punish the haughty lady who would have involved you in ruin."

"Oh, how well you comprehend my disposition!" exclaimed Luigi. Yes—those were the paths which I had to take. And first of all I saw a means by which I might get that haughty lady into my power: for the note which I had borne distinctly specified that if she sent back no answer, her silence was meant to imply that she would accord the interview which was therein besought. So I returned to Angelo Marano; and I told him the there was no answer. I even threw out encouraging words, and represented that my noble mistress had smiled and blushed with pleasure over the contents of his billet."

"You played your part admirably?" exclaimed Zarah "and I repeat, Luigi, I admire a disposition such as yours. Yes, yes—I cemprehend! You had now that haughty lady in your power; for doubtless the appointment was kept?"

"Yes," continued the Italian; "and I had hidden myself in the garden with the intention of bursting into the chamber and surprising them together. But the adventure progressed otherwise than I had anticipated: the Count himself was there, unsuspected by me;—and all of a sud-

den the casement was burst in—the frantic nobleman had forestalled me in what I myself had in tended to do. In an instant it was over · Angelo Marano was a tragedy which I myself little expected—"

"And yet you could not blame yourself," exclaimed Zarah, "O Luigi every instant you are becoming more worthy of my love · for there is something sublime and noble in an Italian revenge!"

Ah! and something fearfully sublime and awfully noble in this one," responded Luigi. "The countess addressed to her husband a letter of explanations, expecially with regard to the share that I myself had taken in the transaction—"

"Oh! then was your opportunity! cried Zarah: "and you told your tale to suit your own purposes, and to confirm the punishment of that haughty woman did you not, Luigi?"

"Yes—it was thus I told my tale." responded the Italian. "Then followed the scene that you have beheld in that picture which the Count so often gloats over. And I myself painted that picture: for as I told you before, I was well educated in my youth, and I possess many accomplishments. And for four days and for four nights did that scene endure; and I, the only confidant of my noble master in the wreaking of his terrific vengeance, conveyed to the apartment a tray of food at stated intervals; and from behind the screen which was drawn in front of the door, I obtained a glimse on each occasion of what was passing within. Now you know everything. There is not another secret which my heart cherishes!"

"Admirable Luigi!" exclaimed Zarah; "you have done all that was indeed an Italian vengeance! —a vengeance sublime and terrible—and all the *more* sublime and all the *more* terrible because the Countess was innocent was she not?"

"Yes—innocent," replied Luigi: "or else, without that innocence, where would have been the vengeance? If guilty, it would have dwindled down into a merely righteous punishment. But why do you gaze thus at me?"—and the Italian suddenly put the question in accents of a vague terror.

"Why do I thus gaze at you?" exclaimed Zarah: and I heard her start up from her seat. "Oh, that my eyes could shoot forth lightnings to strike you down, monster of iniquity that you are! But the truth has been elicited from your lips—and here is the witness!" added Zarah, as she tore open the folding-doors.

The dismayed astonishment, the rage and the terror, which, all combining, seized upon the miserable man, were not however greater than the joy which I experienced at having thus obtained the means of proving the complete innocence of Beatrice.

"An, there shall be another revenge!" suddenly exclaimed the Italian: and like a tiger he bounded towards Zarah,

But she was prepared for this; and instantaneously springing back, she drew a dagger from her bodice. Her fine form was drawn up to its full height; and with the haughtiest scorn and contempt for her adversary, she said, "Dare advance another step—and this weapon drinks your heart's blood!"

It would be impossible to describe the look of fiendish rage, mingled with scowl of utter discomfiture, which Luigi flung upon

Zarah. He then rushed to the door, and disappeared from our view. Almost immediately afterwards we heard the front door of the house closing violently: and rushing to the window, we beheld the Italian speeding along the street. Perhaps ignorant of the British laws, he was apprehensive that he might have committed himself to within the scope of their jurisdiction by the avowals he had made.

"Zarah," I exclaimed, seizing her hand and pressing it with fervour, "you performed your part admirably! At first I trembled lest you should utterly fall in dragging forth the secrets of that villain's black heart: but when I found him becoming as fervid as he was credulous in his infatuation, my opinion changed and I saw that success was before you. And you *have* succeeded!—and by a trifling as well as a temporary sacrifice of feeling on your part, you have done that which will infuse happiness into several souls, and render justice to one who has been well-nigh crushed beneath the stigma of unmerited shame and the weight of bitterest persecutions. It now remains for me to lead the next scene in this drama of real life. Let us inquire if the Count of Carboni be within?"

"He is not," responded Zarah: "for if he were, we should have heard his footsteps below or above—Ah! there is his knock at the front door!"

I issued from the room; and descending the stairs, met the Count of Carboni just as he was entering the house. The maid-servant who had opened the door, entreated rapidly along the passage; and without addressing the Count by any name, I said to him, "Pardon the liberty I am taking but I beg a few minutes' interview with you."

"I have the pleasure of knowing you by sight, Miss Trafford," he replied. "I saw you once at the theatre: you appeared on the occasion in the character of Portia."

I was not at all astonished that he recognised me: for I remembered how attentively he watched me on that particular evening. But scarcely had he finished speaking, when a dark shade came with a sombre scowling expression over his features: and looking at me with his black piercing eyes, he said, "What business can you have with me? For if it relate to—" He suddenly stopped short; and I, fearful lest he should hasten away and refuse me the interview which I craved, quickly responded. "It is concerning your domestic Luigi that I wish to speak to you."

"Ah, that is different!" he said, his countenance suddenly losing that depth of sombre gloom, and recovering its settled sinister expression. "Have the kindness to walk in here, Miss Trafford:"—and he threw open the door of the ground floor parlour.

"My lord," I began, when we were thus alone together—and he started at being so addressed,—"you see that I know who you are—"

"Yes—and I suppose that Luigi has been telling you this secret," interjected the Count, "as well as perhaps some others:"—and again were his keen eyes fixed penetratingly upon me.

"Prepare yourself to learn, my lord," I answered, "that the domestic in whom you have evidently reposed so much confid.

ence, is a villain of the blackest stamp!"

"Ah! is it so?" muttered the Count, a shade again more darkly lowering over his features. "But tell me, Miss Trafford—what has he been saying to you? and how is it that a young lady of your respectability could have condescended to enter into familiar discourse with a valet?"

"Spare your sneers, my lord," I said, with a calm dignity. "Yet I would not wound your feelings more deeply than they must presently be wounded by all that you are to hear from my lips!"

"*My* feelings indeed!" ejaculated the Count of Carboni, almost in a contemptuous tone; "as if I had any feelings left to be wounded!—as if they had not been all blunted, crushed, extinguished—Now, Miss. Trafford," he suddenly interrupted himself, "there is no need for you to enter upon a long preface before you reveal whatever you may have to impart. There is something in your look which does indeed tell me that you know more of me and my affairs than I could have wished"

"Yes, my lord—I know everything!" was my answer: and then with the most solemn look and impressive accents, I added, "Yes—and I even know *more* than you do, my lord: for while you believe your unfortunate wife to be guilty I have obtained the certainty of her innocence!"

The thunder-cloud casts not a more gloomy nor ominous shade upon the earth, than the sombre scowl which now appeared upon the countenance of the Italian nobleman.

"No, it is impossible!" he said, in a deep hoarse voice. "It is as impossible, Miss. Trafford, as that the sun at noonday can be black—or that I by a mere wish could transport myself hence a thousand leagues in a moment! It is impossible!" he added vehemently.

"And I declare, my lord, before God, that it is true!" I emphatically exclaimed.

The Count seemed staggered. Again were his penetrating eyes fixed upon me: but now there was a strange uncertain light vibrating in them—while his lips quivered, and there were certain twitchings and workings of his features which showed how strong was the agitation of feelings within his breast.

"You cannot be ignorant, my lord," I continued, "that I am acquainted with your wife. You know that a short time back she was to appear at the same theatre where I myself have an engagement; and I may add that it was through my introduction—"

"But is this possible?" gasped forth the Count: and he trembled from head to foot: "can it be possible that Beatrice is innocent?"

"She is innocent, my lord!" I exclaimed; "and Luigi has confessed everything! It was he who by the suppression of truth, where it would have served your injured wife—he who by misrepresentation and exaggeration on those points which with a diabolic artifice he could so turn as to tell against her—it was he, I say, who riveted and confirmed all the suspicions which were excited in your mind! My lord," I continued, "it is impossible to blame you under all circumstances for entertaining those suspicions: but further than *that* my sympathy goes not with you. The vengeance you wreaked was frightful and appalling!"

"Miss. Trafford," said the Count

of Carboni, in a voice so deep and hollow that it sounded as if it came up from the profundities of a sepulchre. "if Beatrice be indeed innocent, I have been the greatest wretch—the vilest miscreant that ever wore the human form! But tell me what Luigi has said—keep me not in this awful suspense—let me know the precise circumstances of that position in which I have placed myself!"

The Count evidently made a powerful effort to maintain a sufficient degree of calmness while he listened to the explanations I had to give. He sat down: I also took a chair; and without going back to any of the occurrences in connexion with my acquaintance with Beatrice, I started at once from that point where Luigi's avowals commenced. In short, I detailed everything that within the past hour had been extracted from the lips of that Italian valet. The Count listened with a species of dismayed consternation: his eyes seemed to grow haggard—his cheeks hollow, as he sat in silence, in front of me.

"And thus, you perceive, my lord," I said, in winding up my statement, "that if Luigi had told the truth on that memorable evening, his words would have proved the innocence of the Countess instead of confirming your suspicions!"

"My God, it is so!" moaned the wretched nobleman, in a voice so woebegone and with a look of such ghastly anguish that the spectacle of utter misery could not have been more appalling if a death-sentence had just been pronounced upon him. "Yes—I now comprehend it all! The letter which Beatrice wrote to me contained the most truthful details: and it was the villany of Luigi that blinded me to that truth! But, oh! I will be terribly avenged!" he exclaimed, springing up from his seat; "and with his life the wretch shall pay the penalty of his black iniquities!"

The Count was rushing towards the door, when I caught him by the arm, crying, "Unhappy man! do you dare speak again of vengeance, when the bare word itself ought to strike terror into your heart and make you quiver from head to foot? Luigi is not here!—he has fled—and I question whether he will ever dare return!"

The Count had gone back to his seat; and there he remained for a few moments, gazing upon me with a look of dull vacant despair. His features were now rigid; and there was a ghastly paleness, dead and inanimate, upon the natural swarthiness of his complexion. All of a sudden he started up, wringing his hands, and exclaiming, "Beatrice—poor Beatrice! how fearfully have you suffered! And I, miscreant that I have been—with less compassion than a fiend—with less mercy then a demon!"

Then he again sank upon the chair: he burst into an agony of weeping—he sobbed like a child. Thus for some minutes he remained; and I spoke not a word. At length the violence of his affliction subsided somewhat; and accosting me, he said in a low deep voice, "Tell me, Miss. Trafford, what am I to do? what reparation can I make?"

"It is not of me, my lord," I responded, "that you are to ask these questions. Kneeling at the feet of your injured wife, and in the presence of her relations, should you put them!"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the Count; "there is no atonement

that I would not make! But Ah! first of all there is one thing to be done!"—and again he rushed as if madly towards the door.

"What would you do?" I asked, again seizing him by the arm: for I dreaded lest in his present fearfully excited state of mind he should accomplish some rash act which would only plunge him into still deeper misery.

He turned upon me a countenance in the expression of which horror and anguish were hideously mingled; and he said in a hoarse voice, "That picture, Miss Trafford, to which you have alluded—that picture which the villain Luigi admitted to you that he himself had painted—that picture over which, with shame and sorrow I admit, I have gloated—it must be destroyed!"

"Yes—go," I said, "my lord, and destroy it!"

He hurried from the room; and I sat down—for I felt exhausted by the excitement of the painful scene which had been taking place. Yet in one sense there was the liveliest joy in my heart: for the innocence of Beatrice was recognised by her husband. Yes—most unequivocally recognised!—and I saw that he was prepared to proclaim it in the presence of that injured wife of his and in that of her relatives. Oh! the reader may comprehend the satisfaction that I thus experienced in having brought this important proceeding to so successful an issue.

In a few minutes the door opened; and the Count reappeared. His look was now calmer, but full of mournfulness: his conscience seemed to be partially relieved of the weight which had rested upon it from the moment that his eyes were opened to the conviction of his wife's innocence.

"The picture is destroyed, Miss. Trafford!" he said, closing the door behind him. "First of all I took it forth from the portfolio in which I was wont to keep it I trampled it under foot—in my rage and fury I defaced with the heels of my boots the horrible delineations that were there—then I tore it into a thousand fragments—and finally I burnt them all—watching until the last spark died out of the last piece of shrivelled tinder!"

It was thus in an excited manner that the Count of Carboni spoke. It seemed to me as if—though comparatively calm now to what his state of mind was ere he left the room—he could not possibly subdue himself into complete tranquillity. His disposition was alike mercurial and sombre: his feelings were as easily acted upon as the wires of a galvanic battery by an electric spark; but the effect with him was far from being so transitory. I saw that he was one of those men who in their madness could do frightful deeds—but in whose remorse there was a tinge of that same madness still. Thus I trembled for the consequences; because I knew that though the lips of Beatrice might pronounce the word "pardon," yet that never again could she consort with a man who had persecuted her so diabolically. Nevertheless, whatever those consequences might be, it was of paramount importance that an interview should take place between that man and his injured wife in the presence of her relatives, in order that her innocence might be effectually proclaimed.

"Now, my lord," I said, "will you come with me?"

He understood what I meant; and he exclaimed, "Yes—Oh, yes! I now yearn to accomplish that

duty which is the first of the atonements that I have to make!"

"But understand me well, my lord," I emphatically said, "it is the *only* atonement you have to make. Proclaim the innocence of your wife—and you will have done as much as under existing circumstances it is in your power to accomplish. It is not by any rash deed, such as by avenging yourself upon Luigi—nor by any self-inflicted punishment—that you will prove your contrition or administer balm to the wounded spirit of Beatrice."

"Come, Miss. Trafford," said the nobleman, who appeared to have listened somewhat impatiently to my words, and who offered no comment upon them.

We issued forth together; and we proceeded in a cab to the house where Beatrice dwelt with the Marquis and Marchioness of Campanella. I stopped the cab at a short distance; and alighting, I said to the Count, "Suffer me, my lord, to precede you at at an interval of a few minutes, so that I may prepare them for the interview which is about to take place."

"Yes—a few minutes!" ejaculated the Count impatiently: and it really seemed as if he could neither speak nor act except under the influence of a constitutional excitement.

I entered the house: I found the Marquis and Marchioness, alone together in the drawing-room; for Beatrice was in her own chamber.

"Now at length," I said, "the project which I had in hand, and concerning which I have so steadily abstained from giving you any details, has reached a successful termination! The villain Luigi, who is in London has confessed everything: the Count of Carboni is satisfied of the innocence of his much-injured wife and he is coming to proclaim it. In a few minutes he will be here!"

The Marchioness embraced me with fervour: the Marquis pressed my hand:—and both were profoundly affected. I requested her ladyship to hasten and prepare Beatrice for the interview that was about to take place. She retired accordingly, and during her brief absence, entered into some particulars with the Marquis. Presently the Marchioness returned to the room, accompanied by her sister; and the latter, bounding forward, caught me in her arms, exclaiming that she had every reason to love *me* also as a sister. Scarcely had Beatrice regained some little degree of composure, when the door was thrown open and a domestic announced the name of the Count of Carboni.

The servant immediately retired: the Count threw himself upon his kness at the feet of Beatrice—his face bent downward: he dared not look up into her own. A deadly pallor overspread the countenance of Beatrice: she staggered back a pace or two—but the Marchioness and myself were close at hand to sustain her. A rapid glance which I flung towards the Marquis, showed me how strong a sense of loathing for the wretched Count was depicted upon his features: but it was with a veritable horror that Beatrice looked down upon the kneeling, self-abasing form of her husband, And no wonder! For could she avoid thinking at the moment of that frightful period when he was locked in the room at the chateau, along with herself and the ignominiously-suspended corpse of Angelo Marrno?

"Beatrice, you are innocent!" exclaimed the Count of Corboni "I proclaim you to be innocent But as for *your* forgiveness—"

He stopped short: he slowly raised his eyes towards the countenance of his wife; and then he passionately exclaimed, "Oh, I see that it is impossible you can foregive me!"

It was now that Beatrice, exercising the strongest control over her feelings, said in a clear but tremulous voice, "Yes—I forgive you! But understand me well, my lord! Everything is at an end between us! I am your wife only in name—and never more may we dwell together!"

"I dared not expect it, Beatrice," answered the Count. "I scarcely dared even expect that you would forgive me! I thank you—heaven knows that from the bottom of my heart I thank you! And now farewell for ever!"

Having thus spoken, the Count bent one lingering look of utter misery upon his wife; and he then hurried from the room. None of us chose to make a movement to detain him. What had we to say? wherefore should we prolong a scene which, though it had lasted but a few minutes, was painful enough?

There was a long interval of silence; and it was broken by a repetition of the most grateful expression and affectionate assurances towards myself. I described how the confession of Luigi had been elicited—but without compromising Zarah by name, or speaking of her otherwise than as a young female in whom I was interested, and who had consented to sacrifice her own feelings somewhat in order to accomplish the task which I had entrusted to her. On taking my leave of Beatrice and her relations, it was with a sense of the supremest satisfaction in having been enabled to minister to their happiness.

On the following day I called at an early hour upon Zarah; for I was anxious to learn whether the Count of Carboni had indicated a continuance of a morbid state of excitement. In respect to the first point I learnt that the perfidious valet had not shown himself at the house since he fled on the preceding day: but as for the Count, he had returned thither after his visit with me to the mansion of the Marquis—he had ordered his effects to be packed up—and he had suddenly departed Zarah knew whither.

I thence proceeded to the house of the Marquis; and there important tidings awaited me. A solicitor had called at the mansion about half-an-hour previously: he had inquired for the Countess of Carboni; and he had placed in her hands a deed which he said her husband had instructed him to draw up with all possible despatch. Its purport was to make over to Beatrice at least nine-tenths of his large fortune; so that while the Count thus suddenly enriched his wife, he retained for himself a very moderate income. The deed invested her with the possession of all the Count's Italian domains, with the *one* exception of the chateau and estate of Carboni in the south of Tuscany near the Roman frontier. Having made Beatrice acquainted with the outlines of the deed, the solicitor had informed her that his lordship her husband intended to retire altogether from the word and bury himself in some remote seclusion.

Such was the intelligence which awaited me. I farther

learnt that Beatrice had at first hesitated to accept the deed from the solicitor's hands: but that her scruples were overruled by the representations of her sister and her brother-in-law, who made her comprehened that there was no necessity for her to refuse this proof of her husband's profound sorrow for the past and of his anxiety to make every possible atonement.

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CHAPTER II.

MARY GLENTWORTH.

UPWARDS of three months passed from the incidents which I have just been relating. It was now verging towards the close of June in the year 1841: and I was nineteen years of age. Ten months had elapsed since the mock marriage which had afforded Juliet temporary happiness, and had subsequently plunged her into so much misery. The time was close at hand when she was to become a mother. There was likewise now a vacation in the theatrical world; and I received a very kind letter from Mrs. Oldcastle, requesting me to spend it at River House. She intimated that she would thereby not merely enjoy the pleasure of my society, but that Juliet would have her dearest friend near her in the hour of her trial. Mr. Norman received at the same time a letter from Mrs. Oldcastle, suggesting that it would be more expedient for himself and his wife to continue to keep away from the abode where their daughter had found a home, as their presence at River House would only multiply the chances of Juliet's identity being discovered. For at that house and in that neighbourhood she was passing under the name of Mrs. Half—a hint having been drooped that her husband was abroad.

In consequence of these letters, it was agreed that Mr. and Mrs. Norman should go and pass the vacation at their favourite watering-place, Ramsgate; while was to repair to River House. I did not exactly know what to do with Beda: I did not like to leave her alone with the servants in Hunter Street; I did not choose to consign her to the care of Zarah, for fear lest the gibsy's old grandmother should chance to behold her there, and repenting of having lost her, endeavour to entice her away again; and I did not of course feel inclined to take her with me to River House, unless with the consent of Mrs. Oldcastle. I had every faith in Beda's sincerity as well as kindness of disposition: but still I saw that it would be improper to intrust her with Juliet's secret. The difficulty was however solved by Mr and Mrs. Norman volunteering to take her with them in Ramsgate.

Beda was much distressed when I told her that we must temporarily separate; and though I spoke most kindly to her, yet she fell at my feet; and with the tears standing in her large lustrous, eyes she asked in a voice tremulous with emotion whether I had any reason to be displeased with her? I embraced the poor girl,—assuring her that during the four months she had been in my service, I had never once regretted our acquaintance—that I was sorry to part with her even for a few weeks—but that I was going to stay with a lady who was very particular, and who not like to have strangers in her household.

Beda was comforted; and she agreed to follow Mr. and Mrs. Norman to Ramsgate.

But their was another matter of even greater importance, which at first gave me some little difficulty and uneasiness. At the very time that I received Mrs. Oldcastle's kind letter, the post brought me an affectionate and joyously-written one from Henry Wakefield. The business which had so long detained him in the United States, was verging towards its completion: he had succeeded in recovering all the moneys due to Macdonald, the Paisley manufacturer; and it was his intention to return to his native country with the least possible delay. He farther informed me that on his arrival at Liverpool, he should as a matter of course in the first instance repair to Paisley, where he hoped of find letters from me; but that the very instant he had settled his accounts with Mr. Macdonald, he should speed to London to fold me in his arms. This letter, as well as the numerous preceding ones I had received from Harry, breathed the purest love and the most unchanging affection; and I wept with a blissful pleasure over the epistle as I held it in my hands.

But what Course was I to adopt? If Henry Wakefield were to arrive in London during my absence at River House, he would assuredly set off after me on finding I was not in Hunter Street, and thus sooner or later it would be impossible to conceal Juliet's secret from his knowledge. That secret was not my own; and I was bound to shield it to the utmost of my ability. At length, after much reflection, I resolved how to act. I wrote a letter—directed to Henry, to the care of Mr. Macdanald at Paisely—wherein I requested my cousin to send me an answer announcing his arrival the instant he received it, so that I might have the satisfaction of being assured of his safety. The servants in Hunter Street knew that I was about to pay a visit to River House near Dover: they knew likewise that Juliet was there—but they were ignorant of her situation. I gave them express orders that all letters which might arrive for me, should be at once posted to River House. By this arrangement I calculated that if I received a letter from Henry while there, I could hasten up to London and thus be in Hunter Street before he was likely to reach the metropolis—and I had no doubt that bussiness matters would detain him a day or two in Paisley after his arrival in Great Britain. I felt hurt, and even shocked, at being compelled to have recourse to what appeared to me a certain degree of petty maunœuvring: but it was all for Juliet's sake, and to guard against the possibility of her secret being discovered by any sudden and unexpected visit on the part of my cousin at River House.

But before I dismiss the present subject I must state that the moment had now come when it was absolutely necessary for me to Harry that Ellen Percy and the celebrated Miss. Trafford were one and the same person. Though upwards of nine months had elapsed since he set out on his transatlantic voyage—and though a constant correspondence had been maintained between us—yet had I lacked the moral courage to make the complete revelation. I had however in my letters, under the guise of gossiping information,

recorded a variety of facts to disabuse him of his prejudice against the stage and the dramatic world in general. I had thus prepared him for the final announcement: but still that announcement itself had not as yet been made. It was now impossible to delay it any longer; and I accordingly included it in the letter which I addressed to him under cover to the manufacturer at Paisely. It was through no sentiment of idle vanity—but in order to gratify him, if possible, with the knowledge of the fame which I had acquired—that I enclosed in the letter several critiques from the leading newspapers upon my performance; and this I did all the more willingly, inasmuch as in those critiques there were frequent allusions to me as "a young lady whose unimpeachable character and personal beauty were only equalled by her genius as the greatest actress of the day." I likewise informed Harry in this letter I was in the receipt of upwards of a thousand a year, with every prospect of this income being shortly doubled; and that my savings were therefore already considerable. I delicately hinted that my cousin therefore need have no care for the future, inasmuch as it mattered not in an alliance with two fond hearts from which side riches emanated.

All preparations being complete, I set out on my visit to River House. I accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Norman in the steam-vessled to Ramsgate; and thence on the following day I proceeded alone by the coach to Dover. It was at about the hour of noon when I reached the last mentioned place; and as the weather in that month of June was charming and delicious, I determined to walk to River House, which was only about a mile and a half distant. Leaving my luggage therefore to the care of the carrier, who was to bring it to its destination in the course of the afternoon, I set out.

I was soon beyond the precincts of the town of Dover: and when at a distance of about a mile, I thought of assuring myself by inquiry that I was in the nearest route to River House. I was attracted by a beautiful little cottage-residence, where the roses were blushing over the portico, and where the open windows afforded a glimpse of the neatly-furnished parlours. This cottage stood in the midst of a garden, where there were the most beautiful flowers scattered over the well-kept parterres,—between which the gravel walks were well rolled, and shining in the sunbeams. The garden-gate stood open; and I entered. I was about to accost an old gardener whom I beheld at a little distance, busily engaged in his occupation,—when a glance in the opposite direction revealed to my view a young lady seated at work in a summer-house. This summer-house was formed of wood painted green; its architecture was quaint; and with the jasmine and clematis that twined up the trellis work over it, mingled with festooning roses, it had a sweetly-picturesque appearance.

The young lady did not immodiately observe me as my feet trod noiselessly over a grass-plat by which the arbour was approached; and I therefore had an opportunity of contemplating that pleasing picture before I made my presence known. The occupant of the summer-house was apparently about my own age—namely nineteen. Her dress was

characterized by mingled neatness and elegance. A profusion of light brown ringlets escaped from beneath a beautiful little French cap. and fell upon her shoulders. The corsage of her light summer dress was open down to the waist, but a habit-shirt was modestly closed up to the throat. Her countenance had an expression of the chastest innocence and of the purest thoughts: her complexion was fair—but upon her cheeks bloomed the rose-hues of health. While thus seated at her work, she seemed to be of the medium stature—symmetrically and finely formed—with the well rounded contours of a country-girl constantly inhaling the fresh breeze, with its invigorating admixture of the saline, properties afforded by the close vicinage of the sea.

While I stood contemplating this young lady, she laid down her work to take up a book; and it was at this instant that her eyes encountered mine. And what beautiful eyes were those that were thus raised towards me!—eyes of a clear liquid blue, only a shade darker than azure—full of softness, and yet with a proper animation. She at once rose from her seat, and came forward, tripping lightly down the two little steps by which the entrance of the bower was reached. A smile appeared upon her beautifully-formed. mouth, as if expressing her readiness to render me any service in her power.

"I have to apologize most sincerely;" I said, "for my instrusion. I had merely intended to put an inquiry to your gardener: but on happening to perceive that this beautiful summer-house was occupied. I was encouraged to address myself to you.

"And I am sure I am very much pleased!" replied the young lady, in a frank cordial tone. "But pray do not stand in the sun! Come in and rest yourself; for I see," she added, glancing down at the skirt of my dress. "that you have been walking along the dusty road."

"Only from Dover," I observed, as I accepted the young lady's invitation and followed her into the summer-house, where we sat down together. "I am on my way to a place which can be at no great distance—I mean River House."

"Ah. Mrs. Oldcastle's," said the young lady. "You are not far off—about half-a-mile—and I shall presently have the pleasure of indicating a pathway through the fields But let me offer you some refreshment—some wine and water——"

"Nothing, I thank you. I shall soon be at my destination."

"Oh! but you must taste our fine strawberris," exclaimed the young lady, with as much artless ingenuous cordiality as if our acquaintance had been one of weeks or months instead of minutes; and before I could stop her, she had bounded down the steps, and was gliding across the grass-plat, which her beautifully shaped feet seemed scarcely to touch.

She was gone therefore before I could ejaculate a syllable to detain her. I mechanically took up the book which lay upon a bench; and to my surprise I found that it was one of those editions of Shakspere which contain only the particular dramas that may be read without offence to the modesty. I saw that several passages had pencil-marks against them. as if indicative of the reader's admiration and for more easy reference

in future. The parts thus noted bore strong testimony to the taste of whomsoever had made them; and I wondered whether I might therewith associate my charming new acquaintance. On the fly-leaf of the book was written, in a sweet feminine hand, the name of Mary Glentworth.

I had scarcely time to put down the volume, when the young lady came tripping back to the summer-house, with a quantity of large freshly-gathered strawberries piled up on a plate which she had made of vine leaves, and which she held in her two fair white hands.

"There!" she said, as she deposted her little burden upon the table: "you must do me the pleasure to taste them—they are so refreshing! I tried to see if I could find an apricot for you—but they are not yet quite ripe."

There was something so cordial, so ingenuous, and frank-hearted in the young lady's manner, that I felt as if I had already known her for a considerable time; and in order to please her, I partook of the fruit.

"Oh! you have been looking at my book," she exclaimed, perceiving that it was removed from the spot where she had left it. "When I am tired of working——"

"I hope there was no indiscretion," I said. "in glanceing into volume——"

"Indiscretion?—no!" cried the young lady, opening her beautiful large eyes still more widely in evident astonishment at my observation. "What harm could there possibly be in looking at a book which anybody may read—and which I am sure." she added emphatically, "everybody who *can* read *ought* to read!"

"Ah!" I ejaculated: "this is your book?" and therefore I was at once convinced that she was Mary Glentwroth herself; and I was pleased to have ascertained her name "Shakspere, I suppose is a favourite of yours?"

"If I were a silly romantic girl," replied Miss. Glentworth, laughing, "I should exclaim in a paroxysm of enthusiasm that I adore Shakespere. But, to speak in more moderate language, I may state that I take a greater pleasure in reading his works than those of any other author. I would give the world to see one of his plays represented on the stage! And if I dared envy any one—whom do you think I most envy on the face of the earth?"

"I cannot possibly tell," I said, smiling.

"Well, then, I will enlighten you in respect to those whimsical ideas of mine," continued Miss. Glentworth, in the same spirit of frank and friendly good humour. "I would sooner be Miss. Trafford than any queen that is seated upon a throne! I have read so much about her in the newspapers and literary reviews, that I not only admire her genius, but also her beauty of person and her general character. Yet I have never seen her—Have you?" she somewhat abruptly inquired.

I thought it unnecessary to tell the young lady who I was; for I did not wish to direct more attention than I could help to River House, where I was about to sojourn, for fear lest I should multiply the chances of Juliet's secret being discovered. I therefore said somewhat evasively, "Yes—I have seen her occasionally. But now, Miss. Glentworth, I must take my leave of you."

"Oh, do not go for a few minutes!" she exclaimed. "We are just touching upon a topic that is so interesting to me! You can tell me about Miss. Trafford——"

"Another time, Miss. Glentworth," I answered: "for I am going to stay a few weeks in this neighbourhood—and rest assured that after the kind reception you have given me, I shall not fail to pay my respects to you again. Perhaps, however, you know Mrs. Oldcastle?—you visit at River House?"—and even as I spoke I thought it could scarcely be so; for if it were, Juliet would hardly have failed to mention in her letters that she had formed the acquaintance of so sweet and amiable a being as Mary Glentworth.

"I only know Mrs. Oldcastle by sight," she replied. "Mamma does not visit any one in the neighbourhood: she tells me that she is not fond of society;—and as I have no friends nor companions I am thrown entirely on my own resources. These however do not fail me: for between my work and my books and a few little household duties, I always contrive to occupy myself."

"And you will permit me to renew my visit," I said: "and on a furure occasion I will tell you more of Miss. Trafford."

I then took my leave of my new acquaintance in whom I felt deeply interested. She indicated the path though the fields which led towards River House; and as I was proceeding to my destination, I kept thing of Mary Glentworth. A she had spoken only of her mother and had made no mention of her farther, I concluded that he was dead; and I was somewhat surprised that she should have formed no acquaintance in the neighbourhood. It could not be from poverty, inasmuch as she herself was well dressed—and the cottage, with its large garden, could only have been in the occupation of a lady enjoying a competency. However I resolved to inpuire more about her when I should have an opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Oldcastle at River House.

My destination was reached: and I found that Mrs. Oldcastle's abode was—as it had been represented to me—somewhat in the cottage-style, not spacious but, commodious, and furnished in a handsome old-fashioned manner. It had a good garden attached—besides stables and outhouses,—in short, denoting ample means on the part of its proprietress. I was cordially welcomed by that lady herself; and fervid was the embrace in which I was strained by Juliet. Upwards of four months had elapsed since last I saw my dear Friend Miss. Norman; and I was delighted to perceive by her looks that she was not suffering much in her spirits, but was bearing up with fortitude against the sense of the foul wrong she had sustained on the part of Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe.

I soon had an opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Oldcastle about Mary Glentworth; and the moment I mentioned her name, I perceived to my surprise that a dark shade came over the old lady's countenance.

"Yes, indeed," she said, "from all I have heard Miss. Glentworth is an amiable girl—and she is greatly to be pitied."

"Pitied!—in what respect?" I exclaimed, astonished and grieved at the answer just given.

"Do not ask me too many questions, my dear Ellen," rejoined Mrs. Oldcastle. "It is not a subject proper to be discussed by a young lady like yourself. Suffice it for you to know that Mary Glentworth is suffering from the effects of a mother's fault."

"Poor girl;" I murmured: and so deeply was I moved on her behalf that I felt the tears trickling down my cheeks.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Oldcastle, "she is indeed to be pitied:— but what can be done? Society is imperious with its laws. You see, my dear Ellen, that even in the case of your friend, my grand-niece Juliet, we are compelled to take all kinds of precautions, though she is really far from being criminal—she has been infamously betrayed—and hers is a pure misfortune without the slightest scintillation of guilt. But it was different with Mary Glentworth's mother—and the poor girl suffers accordingly."

"Yet she herself must be ignorant of her mother's false position," I said; for the spoke as if it was Miss. Glentworth herself who voluntarily avoided society instead of being shunned by it. Yes— Mary Glentworth is really ignorant—"

"It may be so—and perhaps it is,"! said Mrs. Oldcastle. "But this much I can tell you, that Mrs. Glentworth, as she calls herself, is every now and then visited by a gentleman to whom she is indebted for the income she enjoys, This at least is indelicate—"

"But are you sure," I inquired, "that there is anything really improper in those visit?—have you the certainty that it is not some relative or very dear friend concerning whom scandal may have busied itself? So far as my knowledge of the world extends— and so far as I have the power of fathoming and appreciating the human character—I feel convinced that Mary Glentworth must have been brought up with the strictest propriety: for she is all artlessness, candour, and innocence."

"It may be so," observed Mrs. Oldcastle, repeating that phrase which seemed imply uncharitable doubt and mistrust: or at least I thought so—and it was a phrase which I did not like.

"There can be no doubt," continued the old lady, "of Mrs. Glentworth's position; and as I have already told you so much, I will tell you a little more, Ellen— because I see that you have an inclination to cultivate Miss. Glentworth's acquaintance, and you must not do so. Some years ago—it may be perhaps ten or eleven—Mrs. Glentworth was residing, with her daughter, who was then of course a child, at Hastings. There she moved in excellent society—passing as a widow; and as her manners are very lady-like, and she is even still handsome, she was a general favourite. Her conduct was moreover so circumspect—at least to all outward appearance—that no one entertained the slightest idea that her character was in reality equivocal. But one day, while she was walking with some of her fashionable acquaintances, a gentleman—I do not think I ever heard his name— or if I have forgotten it—However, it was a gentleman who had only just arrived from London; and he immediately recognised in Mrs. Glentworth the mistress of a friend of his—or rather I should say, such *had* been her position a few years previously. I do not exactly know what ensued, or how

the disagreable incident terminated at the time: but very certain it is that Mrs. Glentworth speedily quitted Hastings and came to settle in this neighbourhood. She had the good taste to avoid making overtures towards the society here,—well aware perhaps that her evil reputation could not fail to follow her."

"The tale," I observed, "has two features which strike me as somewhat extraordinary. In the first place why did Mrs. Glentworth come into a neighbourhood which is only so short a distance from that where her exposure took place?—and why did she not at least assume another name?"

"Perhaps," answered Mrs. Oldcastle, "she wished after that exposure to seclude herself as it were from the world, and make no further attempts to get into society, but to accept her position as a lost and degraded woman. If this be the solution of the mystery which seems to bewilder you, it will account for both your questions. Besides, you must remember that at the time when the unpleasant incident occured at Hastings, Mary Glentworth was a girl old enough to know the name which her mother and herself had been accustomed to bear; and any change of name would have excited Mary's surprise—while it would have also been a circumstance which a young girl could scarcely have been tutored to keep as a profound secret. And now, Ellen, I have told you enough to make you comprehend that you cannot with propriety repeat your visit to that cottage, nor cultivate the acquaintance of Miss. Glentworth."

I said no more upon the subject: but I was much afflicted at the tale I had heard and at the injunctions which I had just received—and all the more so because I could not fail to recognise the necessity of acting in obedience to the latter.

Four days after my arrival at River House, Juliet Norman became the mother of a son; and when she pressed her babe to her bosom, she seemed to forget awhile, in the joy and pride of maternity, the circumstances of sorrow which had preceded and of mystery which attended the birth of her offspring. I wrote to Mrs. Norman to acquaint her with the secret, and to assure both her and her husband that they need not entertain the slightest apprehension in reference to Juliet's health: and in order that the servants might not entertain a suspicion by seeing the address of this letter, I took it myself to the post office at Dover. I should here observe, in explanation of my preceding remark, that, of Mrs. Oldcastle's domestic household, only the lady's-maid and footman who had accompanied her to London were aware that Juliet's real name was Norman instead of Hall; and on their discretion Mrs. Oldcastle could place the strictest reliance.

The return of post brought a reply from Mrs. Norman, expressing her own and her husband's gratification to learn that Juliet was progressing so favourably; and desiring me to thank Mrs. Oldcastle on their behalf for all her kindness towards their daughter. Mrs. Norman's letter went on to touch upon other matters, giving me certain information which caused me some alarm and uneasiness. The special paragraphs to which I am now alluding were as follow:—

"I am sorry to say that I cannot send you a very good account of the conduct of Beda, whose proceedings are alike irregular and mysterious. She frequently absents herself for hours together; and when questioned by myself or Mr. Norman, she either gazes with her large dark eyes fixed upon us with unintelligible meaning—or else she simply says that 'she has no explanation to give except to her mistress, Miss. Percy.' Last evening she thus absented herself at about six o'clock. and did not return until past eleven. We sat up for her, full of anxiety and alarm lest some accident should have befallen her, or that she had absconded altogether. When she returned to the house, she glided up to her own chamber, though positively told that Mr. Norman and myself were desirous to speak to her. and when we just now questioned her in respect to these improper and intolerable proceedings, she again replied simply 'that she would explain herself only to her young mistress, Miss. Percy.' I remonstrated with her very strongly on her conduct, and threatened to write to you. Then her large eyes lighted up with an expression which really seemed to be one of joy instead of apprehension and alarm. You see, my dear Ellen, it is impossible for us to do anything with Beda under these circumstance; and it is all the more inconvenient because the landlady of the house where we are lodging, has made representations on the point. I hope, in the name of heaven, that Beda has not fallen in with bad company; but in any case it is a matter on which I could not keep silent. If you could possibly leave River House for only a single day and run over to Ramsgate, you might fathom this mystery, and, if it be not yet too late, rescue this young creature from the path of destruction! By the bye I had almost forgotten to observe that when Beda thus absents herself, she lays aside her good apparel, and dresses in a strange mean unbecoming way; so that the mystery is indeed all the greater, inasmuch as that vanity which one might think would prompt a young girl to go out in her best raiment, seems to be rendered secondary to other considerations, whatsoever they may be."

Such were the paragraphs in Mrs. Norman's letter which at first filled me with anxiety and apprehension. But as I reflected upon them, I felt my suspicions which were injurious to Beda gradually diminishing; while the thought was stealing into my mind that the young girl might be engaged in penetrating some scheme that had come to her knowledge, and which might after all probably regard myself. But, however the case might be, I saw the necessity of at once repairing to Ramsgate; and as my absence would only be for that day and a portion of the next, I had no difficulty in making some pretext to Mrs. Oldcastle and Juliet.

The letter to which I have alluded, reached me at about ten o'clock in the morning; and by two in the afternoon I was at Ramsgate.

CHAPTER III.

THE YACHT.

The Normans occupied handsome lodgings in a genteel house belonging to one of the crescents upon the heights. On my arrival

I learnt that Beda was again absent—and that it was about noon when, attired in the very worst apparel she possessed, she had stolen out of the house by the back way. When she would return, was a matter of the utmost uncertainty.

"Beda is a singular creature," I said; "but I have every faith in her good principles. Let us not judge her prematurely: she may have the most satisfactory explanations to give in respect to her conduct. When she returns, be so kind as to leave us alone together; and she will speak frankly and openly to *me*."

"I am delighted to hear, my dear Ellen," exclaimed Mrs. Norman, "that you have such faith in Beda's propriety. It would indeed be shocking to think that a young girl who possesses such extraordinary beauty, and in whom you have so much interested yourself, should have fallen into bad society."

"Nothing," added Mr. Norman, "would afflict me more than such a calamitous result.—But come, my dear," he said turning to his wife: "you and I will go out for a walk, so as to leave Ellen by herself that she may catechise the girl on her return."

Mr. and Mrs. Norman went out accordingly; and they had not left the house many minutes, before my ear caught the sounds of footsteps gliding rapidly and lightly up the staircase: for I had purposely left the drawing-room door ajar in order to listen for Beda's return. I started up from my seat, and appeared before the young gipsy-girl just as she was tripping across the landing. Immediately upon perceiving me, she gave vent to a cry of joy: and bounding towards me seized my hand, which she pressed to her lips. There were all the evidences of a real and unfeigned delight in her conduct and her looks; so that not for an instant could I doubt that my presence was a source of satisfaction to her, and that she did not regard it as an interference with any improper pursuits in which she was engaged.

I bade her follow me into the drawing-room; and as I took my seat upon the sofa, I had now leisure to regard her with more attention than at the first instant of our meeting. She was dressed in that same style as when I beheld her for the first time at the door of Zarah's lodgings in London. The skirt of her apparel was short, revealing her beautifully-shaped ankles; and she held in her hands an old battered straw bonnet. The body of her dress was very low: but a dingy *chimisette* was modestly buttoned up to the throat. She had an old scanty shawl: her raven hair seemed to have been purposely dishevelled, as if to complete the negligence of her appearance. Indeed, I saw at once that she had studied to give herself a mean air and also a gipsy-like aspect.

"Beda," I said, in a serious though kind tone, "you can probably conjecture why I am here?"

"And I wished to see you, miss," replied Beda. "Mrs. Norman threatened to write to you concerning me; and I was glad. I myself would have written, only that I knew not your address, and I thought that if I asked Mrs. Norman for it, she would imagine it was a mere piece of insolence of my part—a sort of defiance of her menace to make known my proceedings to you."

"And those proceedings, Beda?" I said, with increased confidence in the young girl: "no doubt you will be enabled to explain them?"

Beda fixed her large, luminous, unfathomable dark eyes upon my countenance; and after a few moment's silence, she said, "At least *you*, miss, do not believe that I have been guilty of anything improper?"

"It is with pleasure I give you the assurance, Beda," I replied, "that I entertained the hope that your conduct would admit of the fullest and most satisfactory explanation. And now tell me—"

"Miss. Percy," interrupted Beda. "I will tell you nothing at present: but this evening you shall know everything. It is most fortunate you have arrived to-day!"

"And wherefore keep me in suspense?" I inquired: "what good can it do to withhold your explanations for several hours?"

Beda gave no answer: but first she gazed upon me with those unfathomable eyes of hers: then she slowly bent her looks downward, and seemed absorbed in deep reflection.

"You do not give me any reply," I at length said. "If you will not explain yourself, Beda, at least show me a reason for deferring that explanation."

"No, Miss. Percy," answered Beda, firmly but respectfully: "I can at present say nothing to afford you the slightest clue to the reading of this mystery. You know that I am incapable of deceiving you!—you have the fullest confidence in me—and I deserve it. Wait until the evening; and then at about nine o'clock, you will see more of the business which I have in hand—and which, as you doubtless already surmise, regards yourself."

I knew not precisely how to act: I did not like this strange mysterious behaviour on Beda's part; and yet I saw by the decision with which she spoke that it was useless to press her for any information at present. I was aware also that she was a singular creature—belonging to a singular race; and that she might therefore choose to work out her own plans according to her own fashion.

"At nine o'clock, you say, Beda I shall know more?" I at length observed.

"At nine o'clock punctually," she answered. "I will join you in the bed-chamber which is appointed for your use."

She then tripped lightly out of the room; and I sat reflecting upon all that had passed between us, until Mr. and Mrs. Norman returned from their walk. I told them that Beda had deferred explanations until the evening,—at the same time expressing my conviction that the girl was sincere and straightforward, though singular and self-willed, in her mode of proceeding, Mr. and Mrs. Norman were much in the habit of yielding to my opinion and suffering themselves to be influenced by my judgment; so that they now shared in the conviction which I myself entertained.

A few minutes before nine o'clock I ascended to my bed-chamber, where I found Beda waiting. She was dressed in precisely the same manner as when she returned to the house in the afternoon; and her countenance expressed a settled firmness of decision, as if she had some serious and important object view.

"Be so kind, miss," she said, "to put on your bonnet and scarf

—draw down your veil—and come with me."

I hesitated to comply with this request. Was it possible that Beda could be deceiving me, and that she was about to lead me into some snare? Was she indeed a secret enemy, wearing the mask of friendship?—was she the instrument of the foes whom I had to dread—St. Clair and Lady Lilla Essendine? I looked a her full in the face I perceived a transient flushing—but very slight—upon that beautiful countenance; and she said, "You mistrust me, Miss Percy! I see what is passing in your mind. Were I thus wrongly judged by any other person in the world, I would at once abandon the project which I have in view —yes, with indignation would I abandon it, and I would leave that person to her fate!"

"Beda," I said, "you really cannot be astonished if for a moment I hesitated to abandon myself to a mystery which is so dark and therefore suspicious. But I will go with you. If you save me from any imminent peril, there are no words too kind to flow from my lips in the expression of my gratitude. But if you mean me mischief, you will never know another hour's happiness; for. as you are aware, my intentions have ever been most disinterested and benevolent towards you."

Beda's splendid eyes lighted up with joy and confidenee; and I again reposed the fullest trust in her: I put on my bennet and scarf—drew down the veil—and followed her. We issued forth by the back part of the house; and Beda, who led the way—having threaded three or four streets—conducted me down to the harbour.

The reader will bear in mind that the incidents which I am relating took place at the close of the month of June. The weather was beautiful; and at that hour—a little past nine o'clock—it was light enough for all objects to be plainly discernible. Beda tripped lightly along, keeping about four or five yards in front of me; and we thus entered upon one of the piers. There were several vessels in the harbour—some moored against the piers, others attached to buoys in the middle of the basins. It was now towards one of the former vessels that Beda bent her steps; and having flung her looks rapidly around, she approached the ship's side. It was quite high water; and the starlight was shining brilliantly upon the bosom of the full basin. The vessel to which I am specially alluding, struck me as being a beautiful craft, little experienced though I was in such matters. It had two tall tapering masts, leaning considerably backward—or "raking," as I belive the nautical term is. Its deck was of remarkable cleanliness; and the brass-work brightly reflected the silver lustre shed from the heavens. I should observe that there were only three or four persons upon the pier besides ourselves—or at least only those within the range of our vision; and they were at some little distance. I beheld nobody on board the vessel itself; and I wondered why Beda was seeking it, and what it could possibly have to do with the business she had in hand.

"William!" she said—or rather gently called out with her musical voice; and the summons was immediately answered by some per-

son emerging from one of the cabins of the vessel.

He hastened along the deck, towards the spot where we were standing; and I now perceived that he was a young man—I might even say a youth, of about seventeen or eighteen years of age—with a dark complexion, but remarkably handsome features. He was dressed in a sailor's garb—white trousers, a blue jacket, and a low glazed hat with a light blue ribbon. His attire was remarkably neat: and their was a certain air of superiority about the yeuth which I might almost term gentility. He looked like one of the picked crew of a yacht; and indeed it had already struck me, by what I could see of the vessel's appointments, that it was of this description. I should add that the youth was moderately tall, and slender: his dark hair was arranged in thick clustering curls: he had fine, bright eyes; and as he greeted Beda with a friendly familiarity, his parting lips revealed a set of teeth as white as ivory.

"Is it all right?" inquired Beda.

"Yes," he responded: 'I am alone in the yacht: all my mates are at the public-house yonder—as I told you they would be. And this lady——"

"This is Miss. Percy," answered Beda,—"the lady to whom I am indebted for the happiness which I enjoy—my kind benefactress for whom I could never do too much!"

The young sailor took of his hat, and made me a respectful bow.

"You will come on board, miss?" said Beda; "for it is here that you have something to see which must serve as the preliminary to the explations I shall afterwards have to give."

Again there was a momentary hesitation on my part—but so transient that Beda did not see it; and the next instant I myself was ashamed of it. We both of us stepped on board the vessel: and the youthful sailor whose Christain name appeared to the William, led the way towards the entrance to the cabin in the stern of the vessel. We descended the stairs; and as a light was burning in that cabin, I was enabled at a glance to behold the beauty of its appointments. It was more spacious than I could have conceived it to be: it wss fitted up with damask sofas, and there was an elegant little table in the middle. The painting, the gilding, the mirrors set in the panels,—all were exquisitely tasteful. But still, as I looked around, I wondered what possible connexion there could exist between this vessel aud any circumstances which regarded myself.

The young sailor, on receiving a sign from Beda, drew forth from pocket a small instrument which resembled a turnscrew; and with this he unhesitatingly forced open a door—which, as I immediately perceived, communicated with another cabin. This latter was smaller than the first mentioned, but it was fitted up in equally-elegant style. I was struck with astonishment at the proceeding by which that door was forced open; and I was even alarmed lest I myself should become implicated in the consequences of so burglarious a deed, for both the door and the framework were so much injured that it would be impossible to control the evidences of the violence from the eyes of others. Beda how-

ever flung upon me a reassuring look; and William. taking up the wax-candle which was burning in the larger cabin, led the way into the smaller one.

There was a writing-case upon the table; and this Beda at once opened. She turned over the leaves of the blotting-paper, as if anxiously searching for some document which she expected to find there; and on perceiving a sheet of note-paper with writing upon it, she ejaculated. "Ah! here it is! Look at this, Miss. Percy," she added, placing the note in my hand.

On glancing at it, I was smitten with astonishment on recognising what seemed to me my own handwriting: but even greater still was my amazement when I caught sight of the first words—"My dear Mrs. Norman"

"Read it," said Beda.—"there is no breach of faith nor violation of the sanctity of correspondence, when so foul a forgery has been committed."

I hesitated not for another moment to read the billet, the contents of which I found to runs as follow:—

"My dear Mrs. Norman,—

"You will be surprised on receiving this to learn that I shall go back to you no more. I have for some time cherished an attachment towards one who is in every way worthy of my love; and to whose keeping I have resolved to entrust my happiness. There are reasons which prevent me from giving more specific explanations at present: but you shall know all shortly. To yourself and Mr. Norman I proffer the tribute of my deepest gratitude for all the kindness I have received at your hands; and to Juliet you will convey for me the assurance of my lasting love. I have two requests to make; and I rely upon your friendship for their accomplishment. The first is, that you will pack up all my effects wheresoever they may be scattered about, in London or at my late residence, and keep them until they shall be called for by some one who will be empowered to receive them. The other request is that you will make known to all my friends and acquaintances the contents of this letter; so that there may be no uneasiness in any quarter on account of my sudden disappearance. With one of those friends of mine I have deposited a packet of papers, interesting only to myself; and this will of course be consigned to your hands when the nature of the present letter shall be made known. That packet you will be kind enough to place amongst my other effects.

"With renewed assurances of gratitude and love,

"I remain, my dear Mrs. Norman,

"Yours very sincerely,

"ELLEN PERCY."

Ejaculations of indignation kept bursting from my lips as I perused this billet: but mingled with my other feelings was an illimitable amazement at the extraordinary accuracy with which my handwriting had been imitated. Indeed, the resemblance was so perfect that if the contents had only been of a nature, which at some period or another I might have composed, I should have assuredly believed that it *was* my own writing. Suspicion for many reasons pointed to Lady Lilla Essendine as the authoress of the forgery, and to St. Clair as her accomplice. I turned to question Beda: but she, anticipating my intention, said, "Not now, miss! You shall

know everything presently. We have yet a deed to perform."

Again her dark eyes flung a signal at the youthful sailor; and he lost no time in obeying it. We returned into the other cabin; and there William, having deposited the wax candle upon the table, proceeded to lift off the cushion of one of the sofas.

"Keep that note," hastily whisspered Beda to me, as I still retained the odious forgery in my hand.

I accordingly secured the document about my person,—watching the while the proceedings of the young mariner Willaim. He had lifted off, as I have said, the cushion of the sofa—the framework of which, as the reader will understand, was a permanent fixture on one side of the cabin: so that indeed it resembled an oriental divan. In the flat surface of the boarding on which the cushion had rested, a small square was made to lift out: and when that piece of wood was removed, there appeared an upright bar of iron, with a cross handle of the same metal. Upon the cross-piece the young mariner fixed his hands firmly; and he turned it completely round—a proceeding which required a considerable degree of force. He then hastily replaced the little trap-door, threw back the cushion over it, and flung a look of strange meaning upon Beda. Immediately after the turning of that iron handle, my ears caught a sound like that of gurgling water underneath the floor of the cabin; and I glanced towards Beda for an explanation.

"Now let us away!" cried the young girl: and she pushed me towards she carpeted stairs.

These was something in the words which she uttered and the movement by which they were accompanied, that seemed to imply the necessity of haste; and I sped up the staircase. Beda was close behind me, the young man bringing up the rear: and in a moment we all three stood upon the deck.

"Now, Miss. Percy," said Beda, "we have nothing more to do *here*!"

"But I insist upon knowing," I exclaimed. "what all this means:"—for I felt frightened, and had vague sensations of terror creeping over me at what seemed to be the sinister mystery of these proceedings.

"You shall know all directly," answered Beda. "Good bye, William," she added, turning to the youth, to whom she extended her hand. "A thousand thanks for all that you have done."

"Whatever he may have done," I hastened to observe, "whether right or whether wrong, it has evidently been with the intention of serving me; and I must reward him:"—at the same time I drew forth my purse.

"No reward will I take, Miss. Percy," replied William firmly; and again making me a respectful bow, he retreated to the farther extremity of the vessel.

Beda and I now stepped upon the pier; and the young gipsy girl hurried me along towards the town. Just as we were emerging from the pier, we beheld a female figure, closely veiled, rapidly approaching. Beda—who was on the side nearest to her—laid her hand upon the arm of that veiled lady, for a lady she evidently was; and the young gipsy girl said to her in a low clear voice, "Everything is discovered, and you are baffled."

The lady stopped short; and the single ejaculation "Ah!" burst from her lips: but Beda

hurried me along—the iron gate at the entrance of the pier was passed through—and as I glanced behind, I perceived the veiled lady still standing, as if transfixed upon the spot where we had left her.

"Who was that person, Beda?" I asked, though not without a suspicion as to what the response might be.

"That person, miss," answered the gipsy girl, "is the authoress of the letter which you have about you—the one whose hand perpetrated the odious forgery! It is Lady Lilla Essendine."

"I thought so!" I exclaimed. "And that yacht——"

"It belongs to Captain St. Clair," rejoined Beda.

There also my surmise was correct: but I asked no more questions—for we were proceeding rapidly through the streets, and in a few minutes we should be at home.

The house was reached: we re-entered by the back way; and unobserved by a soul, we regained my bed-chamber.

"Now, Miss. Percy," said Beda, 'I will tell you everything; and you will learn wherefore I have kept the secret until this moment. But first of all let me give you the assurance that I—poor humble girl though I be—have had the opportunity of testifying my gratitude towards you; for I have saved your life!"

"Is this possible, Beda?" I exclaimed, trembling not merely with the joyous sense of security, but likewise at the thought of having escaped some dread and fearful peril. "Oh, my poor Beda! I who had mistrusted you for a moment! But come to my arms! I told you there was no kindness too great for me to display if your actions justified your words!"

Beda—who had maintained the utmost firmness, composure, and decision while witnessing the various proceedings on board the vessel—now wept like a child: but they were tears of joy which she shed as I folded her in my arms and embraced her affectionately.

"Tell me everything," I said, when she had wiped away those tears from her cheeks—and now it was a luminous look of love she bent upon me.

"Grant me your patience, miss," she said; 'for the tale is somewhat a long one, and I must be minute in its particulars. On the evening when I first arrived in Ramsgate, you remember, miss, that you sent me out to make a few purchases—for you were to leave on the following morning. As I was walking through one of the streets, I met that young man whom you have just seen on board the vessel. We looked at each other with the mutual conviction that we were no strangers. It was he who remembered me first. 'Surely you must be Beda?' he said.—'And you," I immediately replied, at the recognition flashed to my mind, 'are William Lardner," And it was so, I must tell you, Miss. Percy that when I was a little girl, living with my parents in the caravan, William Lardner, who used to travel with his own parents in the similiar manner, was my play mate when the two families happened to meet, which was very often. I had not seen William since the death of my own parents, until I met him that day. He told me that his father and mother were likewise dead: they had died

about three years ago; and he, disgusted with the wandering life of a gipsy, had embarked as a cabin-boy on board a merchant-vessel. It further appeared that some few weeks back, on leaving that ship, he happened to fall in with Zarah's grandmother, who at once informed him that it was in her power to procure him a much better situation—in short, a berth on board a gentleman's yacht. He was introduced to that gentleman: his testimonials were good; and he was at once acepted. He was ordered to repair to a seaport in France, where the yacht was built, and he went on-board. Thence, after a while the yacht sailed for England; and it had arrived in Romsgate harbour the very same day on which I thus met him."

"The same day of our own arrival at Ramsgate?" I observed.

"The very same," replied Beda. "William Lardner spoke in high terms of his new situation; for he was well paid, well fed, and well treated; and he was proud like-wise of the little vessel to which he belonged. I casually inquired of him who was the owner of the yacht; and he answered, 'Captain St. Clair.' The reply struck me with mingled surprise and alarm; for I could not help thinking that the presence of Captain St. Clair at Ramsgate at the same time that you yourself, miss, were here, was something more a mere coincidence and that it might bode danger to you. I did not choose to inspire you with apprehensions which after all might be utterly unfounded:—and perhaps also," added Beda, with a slight blush upon her cheeks, "I had my own little pride—and I thought that if there were really any danger, it should be my task to discover and defeat it; for it was by those means only that I could testify the deep gratitude that I owe you."

"Excellent Beda!" I exclaimed, affectionately caressing her cheek.

"On the following day you left Ramsgate," she continued; "and I resolved to seek William Lard-ner, and endeavour to ascertain through him what Captain St. Clair's intentions might be—whether he intended to remain any time in Ramsgate, or whether the yacht was shortly to proceed elsewhere. I fancied that I were the good clothes you had given me, visits to the yacht would appear strange; and I therefore assumed the poorest garb that I possessed. I soon found an opportunity of conversing with William; and I discovered that he was prepared to do anything for me. When once assured of his good feeling, his sincerity, and his readiness, I took him into my confidence: I told him that I was in the service of a young lady who had done everything for me, and to whom I was bound by every tie of gratitude. You know not, Miss Percy, how strong are the feelings of sympathy which exist amongst persons of my race: we all seem as if in certain respects we have an identity? of interests; and the gipsy will help another in purposes either of vengeance or of gratitude for bounties. Nor was William Lar-dner deficient in such sympathies as these, although he had renoun-ced a gipsy life, and on board his vessel strenuously denied his gipsy origin. To be brief, he swore to assist me to the utmost of his power; and from all that I told him he began to think that it was not perhaps altogether from a friendly motive that Zarah's

grandmother had recommended him to the service of Edwin St. Clair. In the course of conversation I learnt that St. Clair had on the preceding evening visited his yacht in company with a lady who had just arrived from London; and I bade William discover her name, if possible—for I thought she might be Lady Lilla Essendine. You know, Miss. Percy, that Zarah instructed me to watch over your interests, before you took me into your service; and she told me enough at the time to make me think it probable that St. Clair and Lady Lilla were combining their machinations against your peace and security. William Lardner failed not to act according to the desire that I expressed; and he succeeded in learning that the lady was indeed none other than Lilla Essendine."

"And does not Captain St. Clair live on board his yacht?" I asked.

"No, miss," replied Beda: "he has been stopping at one hotel, while Lady Lilla has resided at another. I have watched them, and I have seen that Captain St. Clair has not visited her ladyship at her hotel, but that they have met on board the yacht. By dint of prying and listening, William Lardner succeeded in ascertaining that your name was frequently mentioned by St. Clair and Lady Lilla when they were together: and her ladyship on each occasion wrote a great deal upon pieces of note-paper, but always as if she were copyingsomething from other letters which before her. This was in the inner cabin of the vessel; and it was usually of an evening, after dusk, that Lady Lilla Essendine joined Captain St. Clair there. Still, William's opportunities for gleaning any information were so slight, and the few particulars he could pick up were so trivial that they afforded no clue to the ulterior aims of Captain St. Clair and Lady Lilla Essendine. It was absolutely necessary for me to do something in order to penetrate farther into the mystery. I consulted with William; and we at length hit upon a plan, which I determined to adopt, although it was attended with no small risk, not merely of detection, but even to my life itself!"

"Good heavens, Beda!" I exclaimed; "what mean you?"

"You shall learn, Miss. Percy," she replied. "You remember those sofa-like divans in both the cabins? For the most part they are fitted up so as to form hollows or recesses to contain stores, wine, and so forth. The project was nothing less than that I should conceal myself in one of these recesses; and in order to prevent me from being stifled in so coffin-like a place, William, whose duty it was to clean out the cabins, bored three or four holes in a spot where it was least probable that they would be observed. The evening before last the plan was carried into execution; and when the dusk set in, I glided down into the cabin, unperceived by the other sailors. William quickly followed me: I secreted myself in the hiding-place—the board was placed over me like a coffin-lid—and the cushion above it like a gay pall. But I could breathe freely—and that was sufficient. William retired; and shortly afterwards Captain St. Clair and Lady Lilla Essendine entered the cabin. They at once began to speak in reference tothe machinations which they had in view. I learnt from their conversation that some days

before Mr. and Mrs. Norman left London, St. Clair had ascertained—I know not how—that their destination was Ramsgate; and he had of course surmised that you were to be with them in this town during their sojourn of a few weeks. Then it was that St. Clair had immediately sent to Dunkirk to order his yacht to come to Ramsgate, his intention being to inveigle you on board by some stratagem, or else to seize upon and convey you thither by force at the first opportunity. But it appeared that your immediate departure from Ramsgate after your arrival, had to a certain extent baffled the conspirators; and it was equally certain that they had been vainly endeavouring to ascertain whether you were gone. But as Mr. and Mrs. Norman continued here, they conjectured that it was tolerably sure you would return, for that you had most probably gone to pay a flying visit elsewhere. Thus they discoursed together;—and then, Miss. Percy, you may conceive the horror which smote me when I discovred that those wretches were plotting your death! They spoke of the knowledge which you had of certain secrets the revelation of which would be most fatal to themselves—and which, though you had hitherto kept silent, you were certain sooner or later to reveal. Then they talked of some sealed packet in which you had enclosed a statement of those secrets—and which packet you had deposited with some friend to whom you had given specific instructions with regard to the contingencies in which the packet was to be opened. Lady Lilla Essendine said that she had so accurately studied your handwriting, from certain letters which she had at different times received from you at a period when you were on amicable terms, that she felt assured she could pen a note, in your name, which should succeed in deceiving even your most intimate friends. The object of such a note, as far as I could understand from their conversation, was to be twofold——"

"Ah! and I can also comprehend full well," I exclaimed, "what those objects were! But proceed, Beda: tell me the tale in your own way—it would be better that I should hear it all from your lips than fill of any portions with conjectures of my own."

"Yes, miss," continued the gipsy girl: "there were evidently two distinct objects. The first was to make it appear to Mr. and Mrs. Nerman that you had voluntarily withdrawn yourself from their protection, and that you had gone away with some one to whom your heart was given, so that they should not institute any inquiries after you. The second object was that the sealed packet might shortly come into the possession of the conspirators—"

"And thus the letter was so adroitly worded in respect to the disposal of all my effects, wherever they might be!"

"Yes, miss," proceeded Beda: "and inasmuch as Captain St. Clair and Lady Lilla Essendine had utterly failed to discover where you have been staying for the last few days, they were compelled so to word the billet that it should seeem to allude in a casual but natural way to your *late residence*; so that if it should happen that you left any of your boxes or effects at any other place, they might all be collected together by Mrs. Norman and retained in

readiness to be given up to a messenger whom St. Clair purposed to send to receive them. Ah! you knew not, Miss. Percy, how minutely Captain St. Clair and Lady Lilla Essendine discussed all the details of their plan, weighted all the chances of success and calculated all the risks. But there was one thing which struck me; and this was that they spoke not to each other with any degree of friendliness. Linked though they evidently were in the horrible intimacy of crime, there was yet no intimacy of the heart: but, on the contrary, it rather seemed as if they were two enemies who were stifling their mutual animosities and setting aside their own reciprocal hatreds, in the presence of one tremendous exigency in which they had an identical interest."

"Yes, you are right, Beda!" I exclaimed: "it is so! But proceed, my dear girl: I am still full of suspense."

"Ah! the greater part of my narrative is now told," responded Beda: "yet the most hideous part is to come. I shudder, dear Miss. Percy, when I think of it; and you yourself will be as much astonished as horrified when you come to learn how exquisitely refined was the ingenuity of that dark villany which was meditated against you. The yacht, as I have already said, was purchased in France: and Captain St. Clair had very excellent reasons for thus seeking a vessel in a foreign dockyard—because, when purchased, there were arrangements to be effected which he was careful to veil in as much mystery as possible. All that I am about to tell you, Miss. Percy, I gathered from the conversation which took place between that wicked man and his equally-infamous accomplice. It appears that he lavished gold amongst the shipwrights at Dunkirk: he bound them over to the strictest secrecy—he himself bore an assumed name while thus dealing with them; and he gave them to understand that the vessel, under the guise of a yacht, was in reality destined for contraband purposes on a most extensive scale. He represented that in case of danger from the English revenue-cruisers, while pursuing his smuggling avocations, was determined to scuttle the ship rather than be captured; but at the same time he wished to have the means of achieving this object without the knowledge of his crew—so that there might be no chance of interference on their part. Henee the arrangement which I am about to describe. So far as I could comprehend, a species of water-tight trap-door was fashioned at the bottom of the vessel, just beneath the larger cabin; and by means of a simple apparatus—merely that turning iron handle—the trap-door could be opened."

"Good heavens, Beda!" I exclaimed, starting up in affright and consternation from my seat, as I all in a moment comprehended the sinister mystery of the proceedings which I had so lately witnessed on board the yacht: "then your friend William has sunk the vessel!"

"Precisely so, miss," answered Beda, quietly and composedly.

"Oh! but this was going too far!" I ejaculated: "it was a species of crime!"

"It was only a just retribution" rejoined Beda. "Was no punishment to overtake St. Clair——"

"But there is the punishment of the law," I exclaimed; "and this time it must be invoked——"

"No, miss!" interrupted Beda: "the punishment of those conspirators is already inflicted by the discomfiture of their schemes and the sinking of their ship. I swore to Zarah that in whatsoever manner I might at anytime be enabled to save you from the persecutions of Edward St. Clair, I would faithfulfy abstain from bringing him within the grasp of the law. What Zarah's motives may have been in urging this injunction upon me, I know not: suffice it to say that I swore to observe it. And now, Miss Percy, you understand why I would tell you nothing of all these matters when you pressed me on your arrival this afternoon. I was determined that the vessel should be sunk; and I knew full well that if I unveiled my plan to you, your generous scrupples would militate against it. Now the work is done; and I rejoice—I am exultant!"

Beda's fine dark eyes glanced luminously as she thus spoke; and I could not help saying, "After all, perhaps, you were right: for if the horrible surmise which is floating in my mind—"

"That surmise is the accurate one," interrupted Beda emphatically; "for it was nothing less than your death that was contemplated—your murder that was intended! Oh, think you, dear Miss. Percy, that when I lay concealed in that coffin-like recess listening to the diabolical plans and fiendish intentions of those two wretches; I had any compunction in respect to the course which I should afterwards pursue? Believe me, when I obtained the hideous conviction that it was the life of my own beloved mistress which was threatened, could cheerfully and gladly have handed over those foul conspirators to the strong grasp of the law, were it not for the solemn pledge I had given to Zarah. But let me explain the intentions of those wretches. You were to be either inveigled by stratagem on board the yacht, or carried thither by force when opportunity should serve. This being accomplished, the yacht would have immediately put out to sea; and then, while you were locked in the inner cabin, the villain St. Clair would have executed his fatal project. The trap-door would have been opened—in a short time the crew would have found that the vessel was sinking—the idea that a plank had been started would have become general—prompt recourse would have been had to the boats—and in the confusion none of the men would have thought of *you* until it was too late! All would have been saved but yourself, my beloved mistress! —the tale would have been spread of your accidental death—and no shadow of suspicion would ever have attached itself to St. Clair! These were the frightful plans—these the combinations of a fiend-like ingenuity. But heaven be thanked! they are all baffled!"

"And to you, dear Beda," I said, "am I indebted for my life! But tell me wherefore when I arrived here this afternoon, did you give me to understand that my coming this day was most opportune?"

"Because to-day," replied Beda, "Captain St. Clair is absent from Ramsgate; and he is not to return until to-morrow. He went on board the yacht early this

morning; and having superintended the laying-in of a quantity of wine in the lockers and recesses of the inner cabin, he locked the door. Hence the necessity of breaking open that door just now; for I knew that the forged letter had been left in the writing case: and I wished you to see it as a corroboration of all the details of a story which, without such proof, I feared might be too widly wondrous in its infamies and its horrors to be believed by you. Moreover, I was resolved that you should possess yourself of this letter, in order that you might be enabled to produce it in a court of justice, in case Captain St. Clair should by an audacious step endeavour to brand and punish us for the offence of sinking his vessel. I have only a few more detail to give," continued Beda. "You may easily suppose, Miss. Percy, that mine was no very comfortable position—shut up in that recess for more than an hour the night before last—not daring to move lest the slightest sound should betray my presence—horribly cramped—and at length experiencing an increased difficulty in breathing! Immense therefore was the relief I felt when St. Clair and Lady Lilla Essendine took their departure. William Lardner was on the watch; and he immediately came to rescue me from my narrow prison-house. I can assure you that for nearly half-an-hour I was unable to recover the complete use of my limbs: it was a perfect martyrdom which I had been experiencing. But if in one sense I was horrified at all that I heard, in another sense I was rejoiced, inasmuch as I had fathomed the whole conspiracy—I had penetrated the entire web of fiend-like wickedness which had been so ingeniously woven to enmesh you. I explained everything to William Lardner: he himself was horrified and appelled at what he heard, and at the idea of having enlisted in the service of so infamous a master. He vowed to assist me in whatsoever way I might point out. St. Clair had so accurately described to Lady Lilla Essendine the working of the mechanism prepared for the scuttling of the vessel that I thoroughly comprehended it; and before I separated from William Lardner that evening we examined the iron handle concealed within the bed of the sofa; and he satisfied himself that he could turn it. This morning, as I have already told you, St. Clair visited the yacht; and then he went away, intimating that he should not return until to-morrow. William assured me that in the evening his comrades would be certain to repair to the public-house to have a carouse; and it was settled between us that the opportunity should not be allowed to pass. We were resolved that the yacht should be sunk; and it was my purpose to obtain possession of that forged letter in order to corroborate my tale when next I should see you. But you came, Miss. Percy—and I was rejoiced! You came—I was and determined that you should witness this step that it was requisite to take for the sinking of the sinister vessel which had been intended to serve as your coffin in the abysm of the deep waters of the sea! It is done; and now let St. Clair order his vessel to be raised if he think fit! At all events he will see that his diabolical secret is discovered; and he will not dare recur to that scheme of satanic wickedness in respect to yourself."

"Oh, Beda!" I exclaimed, "how

can I ever repay you for having thus saved my life? Henceforth, my dear girl," I continued, again folding her in my arms, "you shall not be my menial—you shall be my companion—my friend!"

"No, Miss. Percy," replied Beda, with firmness of voice, though her lustrous eyes vibrated with the emotions which filled her heart: "the poor gipsy girl is no fitting companion for an elegant lady like yourself. I am your friend—devotedly and faithfully so: but my friendship must be displayed from a respectful distance. Nothing shall induce me to alter my position towards you. Do not therefore press it!"

"Well, Beda, it must be as you wish," I said caressing her affectionately. "But remember that I consider myself under so deep an obligation to you, that henceforth I shall love you as if you were my sister.—But Ah!" I exclaimed as a sudden thought struck me, "what of your young friend William Lardner? Is there no possibility that he may become involved in any difficulty on account of the occurrences of this evening?"

"How is it possible?" asked Beda. "Who can prove that it was his hand which scuttled the vessel? Will St. Clair voluntarily reveal the mystery of that sinister mechanism, and accuse William of having put into requisition? Or will he not, when it is discovered—as discovered it *must* be by those who take measures to raise the vessel—will he not, I say, with a great show of indignation proclaim his astonishment that a ship evidently intended for all the contingencies of a contraband trade, should have been sold to him as a pleasure yacht? However, let us leave him to extricate himself from this embarrassment as best he may. William Lardner will no longer remain in his service—"

"And what can I do for that young man?" I asked. "He would accept no reward; but yet I must insist upon sending him through you some testimonial of my gratitude: for without his assistance you would probably have failed to penetrate that which you have so appropriately denominated as the tangled web which was woven to enmesh me."

"He will accept no reward, miss!" replied Beda. "He intends to seek another service on board some vessel: and—and," added the gipsy girl with a slight flushing of the cheeks, "he has promised to write to me occasionally; but I told him that I must first obtain your consent before I would agree to receive his letters."

"You did well, Beda," I answered, comprehending that a feeling of attachment had sprung up between herself and William Lardner. "He is evidently a good young man: and although you are both very young yet there can be no harm in your occasionally receiving a letter in which he may tell you how he is getting on. You may inform him that such is the opinion which I have expressed; and you may add that if ever circumstances should transpire, through disappointment or want of employment, to render the succour of a friend needful, he must not hesitate to apply to me."

Beda took my hand and pressed it to her lips. We continued to discourse a little longer upon the topics of such strange, wild, and horrible interest which for an hour had been engaging us; and Beda, as a thought struck her, asked, "How do you think, miss,

that Captain St. Clair could have discovered the inteution of Mr. and Mrs. Norman to come to Ramsgate? Because, you see, he *must* have known it at least a week or ten days before they set off; or else he could not have sent to Dunkirk, to order his yacht to come to the harbour of this town."

"The intention of Mr. and Mrs. Norman to spend the vacation at Ramsgate, was no secret at the theatre—it was generally known in the dramatic world—and, if I recollect rightly, it was mentioned in a theatrical publication. Thus, you see, Captain St. Clair might very easily have learnt the rumour even by accident; while the slightest inquiry would have made him acpuainted with it."

I was now compelled to rejoin the Normans in the drawing-room; but I knew not precisely what explanations to give them. As the reader is aware, I had all along abstained from entering into particulars relative to the persecutions I had endured on the part of St. Clair: and if I were now to describe the proceedings in which I had been engaged with Beda, it would necessitate the complete revelation of all the past. And then, too, Mr. Norman would naturally insist, that, despite Zarah's injunctions, I should invoke the aid of the law against St. Clair; and I should be forced to explain why, apart from those injunctions, there was a motive which induced me to observe certain terms with him: namely, his knowledge of my perentage and of the fatal secret which related to my farther. Therefore, all things considered, I was resolved to tell the Normans as little as possible; and indeed it was so easy to satisfy them; for these worthy people were totally devoid of curiosity—they were simple-minded—and they reposed an illimitable confidence in me.

One rejoining them in the drawing-room, I gave them to understand that Beda had fallen in which some old acquaintances, and that hence her repeated absences from the house. I added that I had been with her to assure myself that she had fallen into no disreputable company; and that her explanations had been delayed till the evening in order that she might have an opportunity of showing me who her friends were and satisfying me on every point. The Normans were themselves satisfied with all that I thus said; and sacarcely had I finished those meagre explanations, when the landlady of the house came rushing into the room, to announce that a vessel had gone down in the harbour.

Mr. Norman started up; and looking at his watch found that it was close upon eleven o'clock but as the night was gloriously fine, the heavens being gemmed with stars, he resolved to walk forth and view whatsoever was to be seen of the catastrophe. Mrs Norman agreed to accompany him I was about to refuse, when it suddenly struck me that I should perhaps do well to glean upon the spot, if possible, whatsoever surmises and conjectures I might there hear passing around.

We accordingly issued forth, and the pier was soon reached. A great crowd was collected in the neighbourhood of the sunken vessel, which had evidently gone down quite straight—for the tall tiperling masts were in an upright position. The tide had begun to ebb; and the water was only just

rippling over the deck—so that the bulwarks were clearly visible above the surface. There was a great chattering amongst the assembled spectators: but I speedily found the universal impression to be that the yacht had started a plank—as indeed there was no other feasible cause for conjecture. Several sailors belonging to the vessel were present: I was enabled to recognise them by the uniformity of their apparel, which precisely resembled the dress worn by William Lardner. He himself I likewise saw; and that he recognised me also, I was convinced—because he for a few moments placed himself near the spot where the Normans and I had halted; and getting into conversation with a bystander, he intimated that there could be no doubt the yacht had started a plank. I understood his meaning: it was intended to convey to me the assurance that the real truth was unsuspected.

After having remained for some little while upon the pier, we returned to the lodgings; and when I sought my couch, sleep stole upon me amidst the reflections which the incidents of that day had naturally engendered. Wild fantastic dreams began to haunt me. I fancied that I was fast secured in the cabin of a vessel which was sinking—that I heard the hurried trampling of feet upon the deck overhead—the bustle of affrighted seamen, mingling with the ominous gush of waters in the hold beneath. Then methought that the handsome countenance of St. Clair was gazing in upon me through some opening in that cabin, with the look of sinister mischief that his face was wont at times to express: and then it appeared as if that countenance gradually changed, with the effect of a dissolving view, into the more beautifully feminine but not less wicked-looking lineaments of Lady Lilla Essendine. Again there was a change in the subject of my dreams; and now methought that I was suddenly transported into a magnificently—furnished apartment, where a horrible spectacle met my view. It was the faithful—Oh! too hideously-faithful representation of the picture which Zarah the described to me—the picture of that scene which Beatrice had also described in such appalling terms. Methought that I beheld the corpse of Angelo Marano suspended to the ceiling in the place where a chandelier ought to hang—Beatrice, half dismayed and half frantic, kneeling at its feet, and adjuring it to proclaim her innocence, from its inanimate lips—and the Count himself leaning against the wall, with his arms folded across his chest, his naturally sinister countenance shaded in the still deeper gloom of his broad brimmed hat. Yes—there was the whole scene, depicted to my vision with a vivid painfulness; and though methought that I endeavoured to close my eyes, yet I could not: an irresistible fascination retained them open, and compelled me to keep my regard riveted on that hideous phantasmagoria. In short, I was under the influence of a frightful nightmare—until all of a sudden I awoke with a start, and with the consciousness that a cry had just burst from my lips.

CHAPTER IV.

MARY AND MOTHER.

IT was still quite darkt; and for a few minutes I felt afraid. There was a vague terror in my mind: but it was gradually dispelled by the exercise of my reasoning powers. Still, after so horrible a dream as this, it was only natural that its influence should remain for some little while behind, and that there should even be a doubt where it were a reality or only a vision.

I could not readily compose myself to sleep again; and I lay reflecting upon all that had occurred during the memorable evening which was succeeded by this night of hideous dreams. I saw that I must not hope that Edwin St. Clair or Lady Lilla Essendine would leave me unmolested; for that even if for a time they seemed to be quiescent, it was only that during his leisure they might prepare fresh machinations and mature new plans. But there was something appalling in the thought that these wretches were seeking after my life, and that I was so trammelled by circumstances as to be unable to invoke the aid of the law. I was really frightened as I thus meditated. Some day, sooner or later, they might catch me unawares—I might stumble into some pitfall so carefully concealed and so treacherously designed as to defy all precaution. What was I to do? To propose terms to such vile miscreants as these—to promise to respect their secrets if they would only leave me unmolested—or to confess the truth, which was that though I suspected much, I had a real knowledge of comparatively nothing. No!—I could not bring myself to the humiliating alternative of negotiating whith such persons—even though this negotiation might regard my very life! In short I knew not how to act: but I congratulated myself on possessing so faithful and intelligent a friend as Beda—for I could not think of her in the light of a menial.

Sleep again stole gradually upon my eyes; and now I slumbered on without the recurrence of any of those dreams which in the earlier part of the night had horrified and appalled me. When I awoke, the sun was shining in at the window: my spirits were cheered and my heart was gladdened by its rays. Having finished my toilet, I descended to the breakfast-parlour, where I found Mr. Norman just preparing to sally out for his morning's stroll before the repast was served up. He asked me to accompany him: for his wife seldom went out so early. I not only longed to court the refreshing breeze of the sea—but likewise to ascertain whether anything was being done in respect to the sunken vessel. I therefore went out with Mr. Norman.

We reached the harbour: and we saw that there was again a considerable crowd collected near the spot where the yacht lay. It struck me even from a distance that the masts seemed to be highher than when I had observed them at about eleven o'clock on the previous night; and Mr. Norman himself noticed the same fact—for he exclaimed, "I do really believe they have managed to float her again!"

Such was the truth: it was

now high water once more; and there floated the yacht, as buoyant and lying as gracefully upon the water as when I had first seen her. As we drew near the crowd of assembled spectators, William Lardner passed by: and he flung a quick glance of recognition upon me—a look which significantly conveyed the intimation that something had occurred. He was dressed as I had seen him on the preceding evening: and I felt assured by his manner that he wished to speak to me.

"If you like to go and ascertain how they floated the yacht," I said to Mr. Norman, "I will wait for you here, a little apart from the crowd."

"Do so, Ellen," he replied: and he was speedily lost to my view in the throng amidst which he pushed his way.

I retreated to a little distance: and William Lardner almost immediately accosted me. Respectfully touching his hat, he hastened to say in a low tone, "Captain St Clair returned to Ramsgate at midnight. Immediately upon hearing that the yacht was sunk, he came down to the pier and I saw that he was terribly agitated. He questioned me. I told him that I was the only person on board at the time; and the finding the vessel was filling, I could not do otherwise than abandon it to its fate. He looked very hard at me: but I maintained my countenance. The tide was all out at about two o'clock this morning; and the vessel lay nearly dry. He descended into the cabin, where he remained for a few minutes; and as a matter of course he turned the handle in such a way as to close the trap-door. On coming up from the cabin again, he took me aside, and accused me of having broken open the door leading to the inner cabin. I did not choose to give the charge a flat denial: I assumed the indignant, and I said that since I had become an object of suspicion, I should no longer remain in his service. He seemed bewildered how to act: but at length he besought me to reveal everything that either I myself had done, and he vowed that he would pardon me. I turned on my heel, and walked away. He mingled amongest the men, and told them that a plug had come out—that there was a trap-door in his cabin by which he had discovered it—and that it was now fitted with another. They evidently thought the tale a strange one: but they made no remark. The Captain went away, having previously locked the entrance to his cabins, so that no one should penetrate into either. The men asked me what he had been saying: I contented myself by replying that he had merely been questioning me relative to the accident. They all think there is something singular somewhere—but they know not what. Sailors, you know, miss, are apt to be superstitious; and this sinking of the vessel for a reason that is so clumsily explained, has produced its effect upon those men. They were not therefore surprised when I intimated my intention of leaving the vessel to-day. As the tide came in, she floated again, just as if no harm had ever befallen her."

"And what are you now going to do?" I inquired; "for you still wear the dress of a sailor belonging to the yacht."

"The Captain came down again at about seven o'clock this morning," replied William: "and again did he question me. But I

would of course admit nothing; and I told him plainly of my determination to leave. He has given orders that the yacht is to be got under weigh soon after ten o'clock; and he is going across to Dunkirk, where, as I heard him tell the mate, he should have her thoroughly looked to. As for myself, miss, I am now going up into the town to buy myself some clothes: then I throw off these that I have got on—and I shall breathe all the more freely when out of the power of such a master."

At this moment Mr. Norman was returning; and William Lardner, with another respectful touch of the hat, sped away—thus preventing me from offering him the remuneration which I intended, if possible, to force upon his acceptance.

"Well," said Mr. Norman, as I again took his arm and we turned to retrace our steps homeward, "I suppose that sailor has been telling you what was the cause of the accident. It seems that those lubberly French ship-wrights who built the vessel—"

"Yes—I have heard it all," I interrupted him, "I believe the yacht is to sail almost immediately?"

"So I am told," answered Mr. Norman. "But what do you think? It belongs to a gentleman named St. Clair; and from all I learnt it must be that very same St. Clair who used to visit at our house in London, but who suddenly left off calling, I never could precisely ascertain why."

"Yes, it is that same Captain St. Clair," I rejoined. "I have learnt thus much."

Mr. Norman went on talking in reference to the accident to the vessel: he little thought how much I could have enlightened him upon the subject! We reached the lodgings; and after breakfast I found an opportunity of being alone with Beda. I told her all that I had heard, and bade her go out to ascertain any other particulars which she might be enabled to pick up; for I intended to delay my departure from Ramsgate until the after-noon. She went out accordingly, and was about an hour absent.

"I have seen William Lardner," she said, "and have learnt something more. He went to purchase his clothes, and then returned to the vessel to change them and fetch away what else belonged to him. Captain St. Clair went on board shortly after nine o'clock, and bade William follow him to the cabin. You may suppose, miss, in what a state those beautiful little rooms must be after being filled with water for some hours! When they were alone together, Captain St. Clair immediately said to William, 'I know that you are at the bottom of all this: it is useless for you to deny it. Last night, between nine and ten o'clock, two females, coming from the direction of the yacht, met the lady whom you have seen on board with me; and one of them whispered to her something which proved that there has been treachery at work. Besides,' added Captain St. Clair, 'there is a letter missing from the writing-case in the inner cabin; and this door has been forced open.' Then William Lardner fixed his eyes upon St. Clair, and said to him, 'You had better not ask me, sir, any more upon the subject. If you think I am in your power you had better try it: give me into the custody; and we shall see who will come

best off.' Captain St. Clair produced a handful of gold and bank-notes, but William Lardner turned upon his heel, hastened up the stairs, and a few minutes afterwards left the yacht. I have bidden him farewell," added Beda, in a voice that was now slightly tremulous; "he is going elsewhere to look for another ship; but I told him that he might write to me occasionally."

It was tolerably evident that Lady Lilla Essendine had not on the previous evening suspected that I was one of the "two females" to whom St. Clair had alluded in his conversation with William Lardner. I could fancy how bewildered and dismayed the two conspirators must be at finding that their plan was a completely baffled—and how infinite must be their wonderment and suspense in respect to the mode by which all their treacherous designs had become known.

"There!" exclaimed Beda, who had happened to glance forth from the window, which was open and commanded a full view of the harbour: "the yacht is sailing."

And it was so. Her white sails were spread: but they had not as yet fully caught the breeze; she was therefore moving slowly yet gracefully out of the basin, crowds being still collected on the piers to behold her.

I went out into the town to purchase some little present as a token of my gratitude for Beda; and at two o'clock I took my departure by the coach for Dover. We had to passs through Deal; and the vehicle stopped to taken up two ladies, who were walking on wallmer Road, a little beyond the town. Hitherto I had been the sole occupant of the interior of the coach; and I was aroused from my reflections to make room for the newcomers. To my surprise one of the ladies was none other than Mary Glentworth; and she gave went to an ejaculation of joy on beholding me. I shook hands warmly with her; and it was with equal cordiality that she returned the pressure.

"Allow me to introduce you to my dear mother," she said, with all that artlessness which was natural to her. "This mamma," she added, turning to her companion, "is the young lady of whom I spoke to you and who promised to visit me again."

It was in the effusion of my friendly feelings, my compassion and my sympathy for Miss. Glentworth, that I had obeyed a natural impulse by proferring my hand so cordially. But now that she presented me to her mother all that I heard from Mrs. Oldcastle rushed to my memory; and it was only a cold distant bow that I bestowed upon Mrs. Glentworth. Her daughter did not, however, observe my frigidity of look and manner—for she was at the instant settling herself in her place within the narrow compass of that most limited of all conveyances—the interior of a country branch-coach. Mrs. Glentworth gave a slight and scarcely-perceptible inclination of the head: but her countenance denoted not the least confusion. On the contrary, there was a calm, lady-like self-possession about her which struck me as being either indicative of conscious innocence or else of the consummate art of dissimulation. She was about thirty-eight or forty years of age—retaining the traces of beauty of no common order, but which had evidently been marred by either ill health or care—methought by both combined. She

was rather tall of stature, and well shaped. Her attire was plain yet displaying the most respect good taste: it was lady-like and genteel, without pretension. Altogether Mrs. Glentworth was a person in whom, for her own sake as well as for her daughter's, I could have become interested, were it not for the narrative which I had received from the lips of Mr. Oldcastle.

"You promised to pay me another visit," said Miss. Glentworth; "and it was a week ago that I first had the pleasure of seeing you."

"I was in the first instance compelled," I answered "to devote myself to the friends whom I went to visit at River House: and yesterday I proceeded to Ramsgate to see some other friends who are staying there."

'You therefore perceive, my dear Mary," said Mrs. Glentwoth, mildly, and yet with a certain accent of decisiveness, "that this young lady's time has been completely occupied: and doubtless it will continue so during her stay at River House."

I perfectly well comprehended that this speech was purposed to silence Mary Glentworth's implied invitation for me to visit her: but the artless girl herself did not take it in the same light; for she evidently neither knew nor suspected the existence of any reason wherefore I should *not* visit her, or why an intimacy should not spring up between us. She therefore went on speaking in that same strain which her mother had endeavoured to interrupt—till I myself gave the conversation a turn; and Mary reverted not to the first topic during the remainder of the distance of some seven or eight miles which had to be accomplished before Dover was reached. Mrs. Glentworth remained silent almost the whole way, but when she occasionally threw in a word, it was addressed to her daughter and not to me. Mary herself sustained the discourse; and I treated her with as much kindness of manner as I could possibly display; for I not merely commiserated, her, but I could not help entertaining a sentiment of friendship for the poor girl who was made to suffer, though unconsciously, on her mother's account.

When Dover was reached, and the coach stopped at its office, Mary asked me if intended to walk to River House?—adding, before I could answer the question, "For if so, I shall enjoy the pleasure of your company some little time longer."

"We cannot immediately set out for the Cottage, my dear Mary," said Mrs. Glentworth. "I have some shopping to do—several purchases to make—and therefore we will not interfere with this young lady's arrangements."

Mary for a moment looked disappointed; and taking my hand, she said, "But you will come and see me again—will you not?"

"Yes," I answered,—"most assuredly:" for how could I possibly wound the feelings or distress the heart of that amiable girl?

It seemed to me that for an instant Mrs. Glentworth bent upon me a half-mournful look of gratitude: but I was not altogether sure—for the next moment she bowed coldly and walked away with her daughter.

As I was proceeding through the streets, thinking of my interview with the Glentworths, and

wondering how I could possibly keep my promise to revisit Mary, I happened to glance through the window of a large printshop which I was passing; and there I was struck by beholding a portrait of myself. It was a lithographic print, and was very well executed, —although I had not sat to have my likeness taken for the original of any such picture. There were several other persons looking in at the shop-window; and I therefore did not choose to tarry upon the spot: but as I pursued my way, I thought to myself that Mary Glentworth would now most probably soon discover who I was; for she would presently have to pass by that very same shop on her way homeward.

I continued my walk; and the Cottage where the Glentworths dwelt was already in sight, when a stage coach, coming from the opposite direction—namely, from Canterbury or London suddenly pulled up in front of the picturesque little habitation. I saw a gentleman alight from the interior; a small carpet bag was handed to him he entered the garden—and the coach drove on. As I passed the Cottage I caught a glimpse of the gentleman through one of the parlour-windows: but it was so transient and casual as to prevent me from being enabled to see what he was like—or whether old or young But I recollected that Mrs. Oldcastle had told me how the gentleman from whose purse Mrs. Glentworth derived her income, occasionally visited at the Cottage; and I could not help agreeing in my own mind with the observation which the old lady had made at the time, to the effect that it was an indelicate proceeding. The incident therefore decided me that I would *not* visit Mary Glentworth: but I was grieved and even distressed at the necessity of arriving at such a conclusion.

I reached River House; and found that Juliet was progressing as favourably as could be desired —while the babe gave equal promise of healthfulness. I was enabled to assure Juliet that her parents were quite well, and that they were enjoying themselves at Ramsgate as much as was possible considering the circumstances which compelled them to remain seperate from their muchloved daughter.

It was in the evening of the following day that I was rambling out by myself through the adjacent fields,—when as I was drawing near a stile, I perceived Mary Glentworth hastening to me from the opposite direction. Towards her, now that we were alone together, I was resolved to maintain that air of friendliness which I had hitherto worn. We both reached the stile at the same instant: but instead of immediately accepting my hand, she gazed upon me with a earnest, half joyous expression of continuance and then suddenly exclaimed, "Yes —it must be! You yourself are Miss. Trafford!"

I smiled, as she now took my hand, which she pressed with effusion; and she cried, "Oh, why did you not tell me so at first? You know not what pleasure you would have afforded me! And I who spoke to you about yourself on that very first occasion when we met!"

"I can assure you, my dear Miss. Glentworth," I answered, "I had no particular reason for making a mystery of the fact—unless it were that being stated with popularity for a season, I

wished to remain as secluded as possible during my vacation at River House."

"Oh, I saw your portrait in a print-shop yesterday at Dover!" exclaimed Mary; "and you may conceive my astonishment when I recognised it. I purchased it; and I do believe that when I got home I should have done nothing but contemplate it for all the remainder of the day, only that we found some one had arrived to whom I was bound to devote all my attention!"

"Indeed," I said, not knowing precisely what remark to make.

"Yes—I found my dear uncle waiting for us at the Cottage," proceeded Mary Glentworth; "and whenever he comes to visit us—which he does every now and then for a day or two at a time—he is always so kind and good to me, that I am only too happy to show how much I love him in return. He came by the coach yesterday; and he will not go away until to-morrow. I should have been so pleased to tell him that I had accidentally formed your acquaintance: but my mother bade me say nothing upon the subject—for it seems to be my uncle's wish, as well as her own inclination, that we should live as secluded as we are doing."

"Your uncle, then, I presume, lives at some distance?" I observed, rather by way of saying something than because I had any curiosity upon the point: for after what Mrs. Oldcastle had told me, I more than fancied that it was really no uncle at all—but perhaps even a much nearer relative, though Mary might suspect it not.

"Oh! Mr. Glentworth lives in London," was her prompt and ingenuous answer. "He is the brother of my poor father, who has long been dead. Indeed he died in my infancy—and therefore I have not the slightest recollection of him."

"After all," I thought to myself, "what if the whole tale, as Mary has been taught it, and as she is now telling it to me,—what if it be true? And what if some family reasons, unknown to the world in general, have doomed Mrs. Glentworth to her present existence of seclusion?"

Such was the charitable construction which I endeavoured to put upon the matter; yet I could not persuade myself that it was so; for it fell to the ground in the presence of that part of Mrs. Oldcastle's narrative which declared that Mrs. Glentworth's real character had been thoroughly unmasked some years back at Hastings.

"Oh, Miss Trafford," continued Mary Glentworth, "I do hope that I shall have the pleasure of at least an hour's conversation with you some day before you leave this part of the country: for I have already confessed to you my admiration for those beautiful creations of Shakspere by the personification of which you have earned so much fame. I cannot remain here now any longer—I have merely been to take something to a poor woman who lives in yonder hut—and I must return home as speedily as possible."

"We shall see each other again, my dear Miss. Glentworth," I answered—thus evading the necessity of giving and definite reply in respect to my promised visit.

We shook hands and separated Mary hastening in one direction, while I proceeded in the other.

I continued my walk, pondering all she had said in respect to her alleged uncle, and hoping for the young lady's sake that it was consistant with truth, when I reached the hut which had been the object of her visit. Remembering that she had spoken of some poor woman who dwelt there, I felt inclined to ascertain whether any little additional charity which I might be able to afford would prove of any service; and I entered accordingly. In the cottage I heard a tale which proved how Mary Glentworth and her mother did much good in secret—privately and without ostentation; for I found that this was by no means an isolated case in which poverty had beens occoured and sickness ministered unto by those ladies. I gave something from my own purse to the poor dwellers in that cottage; and I began slowly to retrace my way homeward, sorrowfully reflecting on the evil which I had from Mrs. Oldcastle in respect to Mrs. Glentworth, and sincerely hoping that despite all circumstantial evidence it might be in reality naught dut the echo of whispered calumny.

I was already in the neighbourhood of River House, when I observed Mrs. Glentworth herself approaching through the same field which I was traversing. It at first struck me that she was perhaps on her way to visit the same cottage where I had so recently been: but then methought that she would scarcely follow so closely in the steps of her daughter, as there was no pressing necessity for such a double act of charity at the cottage itself, and moreover as she had a visitor at her own home. In a few minutes met; and instead of passing me by, as I had expected Mrs. Glentworth stopped, saying "Will you permit me, Miss. Trafford, to have a few words with you?"

I bowed, and stood still.

"You saw someone arrived at my dwelling yesterday?" she continued; "and you doubtless recognised him? May I hope that with that delicacy of feeling for which the world so justly gives you credit you have abstained from naming him to your friends at River House?"

"I can assure you, Mrs. Glentworth," I answered, astonished at the speech which was thus addressed to me, "that I did not recognise the gentleman who called at your dwelling. I saw him alight from the coach—"

"And you did not recognise him?" exclaimed Mrs. Glentworth with a sudden lighting up of the countenance, as if she experienced an indescribable relief. "Yet he saw you—he knew you—it even struck him that as you passed the cottage, you glanced at the windows—"

"I may have done so, Mrs. Glentworth," I responded; "but it was through no feeling of curiosity. As for the gentleman, whoever he may be, I repeat my assurance that I recognised him not."

"My daughter just now told me that you were walking in this direction," resumed Mrs. Glentworth; "and I resolved to come forth in the hope of meeting you. I am glad that I have done so. And now permit me, Miss. Trafford, to express my warmest gratitude for the kind manner in which you have dealt with my daughter. I understood full well all that must have been passing in your mind when we were fellow-

travellers yesterday; and believe me, I appreciated the mingled generosity and delicacy with which you answered the poor girl's repeated invitations that you would renew your visit."

"I had conceived a friendship for Miss. Glentworth," I replied: "she is amiable and open-hearted—"

"She is the best and most affectionate of daughters!" ejaculated Mrs. Glentworth; and then the tears started from her eyes. "Miss. Trafford," she hastily added, "your kindness towards her is something that I never can forget!"

With these words she abruptly turned away; and retracing her steps across the field, was soon concealed from my view by a little copse which she had to traverse in order to reach her own home. She left me full of astonishment. Who could the person be that was now staying at her house, passing as her brother-in-law and as Mary's uncle?—wherefore should there have been so much apprehension lest I had recognised him and revealed his name? I was bewildered what to think:—but in respect to Mrs. Glentworth herself, I feared, from what had just taken place between us, that there was more reason than ever to believe the tale which I had heard concerning her.

I returned to River House; and after tea, as the evening was most deliciously serene, I walked in the gardens attached to the dwelling. It was about nine o'clock that I happened to be standing at the front gate—contemplating the high bold outsides of Dover Castle, which was plainly visible from that spot—when a young female, evidently a servant-maid, rushed towards me, exclaiming, "Oh! are you Miss. Trafford?"

"I am," was my answer. "But good heavens! who are you? what has happened? wherefore this wildness of your looks?"

"Pray come to the Cottage! for God's sake come!" cried the girl, who seemed to be half frenzied. "My mistress is dying!—it is young miss who has sent me—"

"Do you mean Miss. Glentworth?" I asked, horrified by the announcement which had just smitten my ear.

"Yes! for God's sake come!" repeated the maid servant: and when she saw that I hesitated not another instant to open the gate, she darted away again in the direction of the Cottage, evidently to announce that her mission had been successful and that I was on my way thither.

I sped with all possible haste—every other consideration being absorbed in the sense of a paramount Christian duty which I was called upon to fulfil. In a very few minutes I reached the Cottage. The maid-servant met me on the threshold of the front-door, which stood open; and to the hurried question which I but, I received the answer that Mrs. Glentworth yet lived, but that her distracted daughter thought that she was dying.

"And has no medical man been sent for?" I anxiously inquired.

"Yes! Mr. Glentworth has gone for one," was the servant's response, "But come, miss! This way!"

She led me up the staircase; and I was shown into a bed-chamber were Mrs. Glentworth was, lying half undressed upon the bed, and Mary was giving way to piteous lamentations. I saw at once

that her mother was in a state of unconsciousness; but that the still lived was evident from the feeble yet painful gaspings which she made for breath. The instant Mary beheld me she flew towards me, exclaiming in a half-frenzied voice, 'Oh, Miss. Trafford! save my dear mother!"

I perceived that everything had been done which unskilled human aid could possibly do, while awaiting medical assistance. Mrs. Glentworth's apparel had been loosened—some taken off: her head was propped up with pillows—there was an odour of vinegar in the room—and bottles of volatile essences stood upon a side-table. I was just about to speak some soothing words to Miss. Glentworth, when the sounds of men's footsteps hastily ascending the staircase reached our ears; and Mary exclaimed, "Heaven be thanked! my uncle and the surgeon!"

The next instant two gentlemen made their appearance; one was the medical man who had been hastily fetched—and who, I should observe, was not the same that had attended upon Juliet: but the other—what words can depict my astonishment on recognising the Duke of Ardleigh!

And this recognition was mutual: There was a momentary start—a transitory confusion on the part of his grace; and then quickely accosting me, he said in the lowest possible whisper that could be audible to my ear alone, "Name me not!—name me not, Miss. Trafford, I beseech you!"

I flung upon him a glance which significantly implied that his secret was sacred with me; and this little incident passed unperceived by the others present—for the surgeon was already by the bed-side of Mrs. Glentworth, while Mary and the maid-servant were gazing with anxiety upon the countenance of him whose first look or word might put an end to all suspense by declaring that there was hope or that there was none!

I now advanced towards the couch, as did the Duke of Ardleigh also; and the next moment Mary Glentworth sank with a convulsing sob upon her knees; for she had gathered from the countenance of the medical man that there was indeed no hope.

"Take the young lady away," said the surgeon, turning to the Duke of Ardleigh and speaking in a low whisper: "in a few minutes her mother will be no more! No human aid can save her!"

Notwithstanding that these were cautiously uttered in the lowest possible wishper, they nevertheless caught the years of the unfortunate girl whom they so deeply regarded; and then an anguishing, agonizing scene took place. She threw herself upon the unconscious form of her mother, beseeching that beloved parent to open her eyes—to look upon her, if only for an instant—to speak a word, if only a single one—to live for the sake of that daughter who so deeply and devotedly loved her! The tears were raining down my cheeks: the Duke was powerfully affected: the young maid-servant wept bitterly; the sergeon, though doubtless well accustomed to look upon death-bed scenes, was himself much moved. At length there was a wild shriek which came pealing from Mary's lips—a shriek so piercing that it seemed sufficient

to rend the brain of each who heard it, and to rive the very walls asunder. That shriek was uttered at the instant the unfortunate girl was smitten with the conviction that all was over and that her parent was no more. Then pressing her hands in wildest frenzy to her brows, she would have fallen back had not I sustained her in my arms.

She had fainted; and we bore her to another chamber. It was a long time ere she recovered and then it was again a long time ere she could believe that it was otherwise than a frightful dream through which she had been passing. But when she could no longer shut out from herself the conviction of the awful truth, she gave way to the frenzied wildness of her grief: she would have flown to the death-chamber, had not the maid-servant and myself restrained her. When that paroxysm of the ineffable agony of her mind was passed, the poor girl sank into the torpor of blank despair—that condition of mind which is so close upon apathy itself that must have been wisely intended by heaven as a means to save the racked and over-wrought brain from utter madness.

I was determined not to leave Mary Glentworth that night. I penned a hasty note to Mrs. Oldcastle, to state what had occurred, and wherefore I absent myself from River House; and I sent the billet by the maid-servant.

The surgeon took his departure: the Duke of Ardleigh came up to the chamber, which I had now remained alone with Mary Glentworth; and bending over her, as she lay upon the couch, he said with a deeper feeling than I could have thought him capable of, "My dearest girl, henceforth you shall find a father in me!"

Mary only raised her eyes vacantly towards his countenance; and I motioned his lordship to withdraw—for I saw that her mind was now so utterly exhausted and that her physical strength was likewise so prostrated, it was probable she would sink into sleep—and I hoped that such would be the case. My expectations were fulfilled—my wish was gratified: her eyes gradually closed—and she slumbered.

The maid-servant returned; I left Miss. Glentworth in the care of the young woman; and I descended to the parlour—for I had seen by the Duke's manner, when he came up to the bed room, that he wished to speak to me. On entering the parlour I found him pacing to and fro in an agitated manner; and so absorbed was he in his thoughts, that he did not immediately perceive me. I shutting attracted his attention. He advanced towards me; and seizing my hand, shook it warmly,—saying, "You have acted a generous part towards me, and a kind one towards poor Mary."

I had not forgotten how the Duke of Ardleigh had dared some little while back to make me a particular overture through the medium of Mr. Peaseblossom; end how that proceeding on his part had led to unpleasant consequences with myself, his son, and the Duchess. I therefore could entertain but little respect or friendship for the Duke of Ardleigh: yet this was not an occasion to exhibit any hostile feeling towards him nor even to treat him with unncessary coldness; for by the incidents of the evening I had become almost

completely convinced that he had the best possible reason for assuring Mary that he should henceforth find a father in him.

"And you have not metioned Miss. Trafford, to poor Mary that you know who I am—that I am other than she thinks me?"

"No, my lord," I responded "By a look I gave your grace to understand at the very outset, that your secret was safe with me. But if my surmise be correct, my lord, there ought no longer to be any mystery——"

"What! Miss. Trafford!" he exclaimed: "reveal to Mary the story of her mother's shame—suffer her to learn that I, whom she regards as her uncle, am indeed——"

He stopped short: and I added impressively, "Her own father!"

"Yes—it is so," rejoined the Duke: and then he resumed his agitated walk two and fro in the parlour.

"Mrs. Glentworths, illness was very sudden, my lord?' I said. "I met the poor deceased lady only a couple of hours before I was summoned hither behold her stretched upon the bed of death."

"Yes, it was very sudden," answered the Duke, again stopping short. "She told me that she met you—indeed she went out on purpose. We cherished the belief that if you had recognised me yesterday when I alighted from the coach, your delicacy of feeling and kindness of heart would have prompted you to keep the secret; but still we were not certain—we wished to have our doubts cleared up—and therefore she went forth to seek you. She came back, tranquillized in her mind: we were seated nere together, in this very room—and Mary was with us—when all of a sudden the poor creature gave a start raised her hand to her head, murmured something incoherently, and fell senseless upon the fioor, I rushed off to procure medical attendance——".

"It was doubtless the bursting of a blood-vessel in some vital part." I mournfully observed. "But, my lord you will soon have to reflect upon the course which you must pursue in respect to your daughter—"

"Yes, yes—it is that which is bewildering me!" cried the Duke. "I would not for the world that the secret should be known to my wife—to my children! I will provide handsomely for Mary: but where am I to place her, innocent and inexperienced as she is! You see, she knows nothing of the world! Her artlessness, her innocence, her too-confiding generosity, would all render her the more easy prey to the wiles of the tempter. What can be done? For heaven's sake advise me, Miss Trafford!"

I reflected for a few minutes. I knew that Mrs. Oldcastle possessed a good hurt amidst all her eccentricities; and I thought it not altogether improbable that she might afford the orphan Miss Glentworth a home, at least for a while, until some other arrangement could be made for her advantage. I suggested this to the Duke,—proposing if he thought fit, to speak to Mrs. Oldcastle on the subject.

"Do anything you will, Miss. Trafford!" he said: "I really seem to have lost all power of reflection! Altogether I am terribly embarrassed. The Duchess is to meet me at Dover tomorrow: we are going together on the Continent. She fancies that I am at Hastings, where we have friends residing. She may even have already arrived at Dover

for aught that I know—though I have not seen her travelling carriage pass this way."

"But it is impossible, my lord," I exclaimed, "that you can leave poor Mary so soon, and in such circumstances. There's the funeral to superintend. I myself was cheerfully do anything to relieve Mary of anxiety and trouble: but there are certain things which your grace only can look after. And suppose too that Mrs. Oldcastle should refuse the favour which I purpose to seek at her hands—"

"Good heavens! I am bewildered!" said the Duke: and his agitated walk was resumed. "If this were to get to the ears of the Duchess—if she were to learn that even in the first years of our marriage I had contracted this intimacy—"

"Hark, my lord!—what is that?" I suddenly ejaculated, as strange alarming sounds broke upon my ears.

It seemed as if some equipage—a stage-coach, a post-chaise, or travelling-carriage, it was impossible to conjecture—which—had suddenly come to a full stop, accompanied by a crash as if it were breaking down, and this being followed by the plunging of horses, the confused cries of men, and the screams of women. I rushed out of the house, closely followed by the Duke. It was now eleven o'clock at night: but the heavens were covered with stars—the weather was beautiful—and it was so light that all objects were clearly discernible. We sped to the gate; and just at that very instant two females were approaching it,—they evidently having alighted from an equipage which had broken down at a distance of about fifty yards. I could distinguish the postilions unharnessing their four horses; and the glare of the lamps showed me likewise a couple of domestics in livery—but what livery it was I did not recognise. As the two females drew near, I saw that one was a lady, while the other had the appearance of being her maid; and they were both coming towards the gate.

"Good heavens!" suddenly murmured the Duke with a groan; "the Duchess herself!"

And the Duchess of Ardleigh it assuredly was. The Duke stood petrified with terror and bewilderment; and I myself was seized with confusion and excitement—for I foresaw a scene of some description or another. Indeed, unless the whole truth were told, I perceived at a glance that I myself might become the object of the most injurious suspicions on being thus discovered with the Duke, at that time of night, at an insolated cottage.

"What! Miss. Trafford? is it possible?—*you* here!" cried the Duchess, at first in tones of joyous amazement: but the next instant suddenly descrying her ducal husband, she drew herself up with disdainful hauteur to her full height, saying, in accents of cold contemptuous scorn, "And it is thus that the celebrated Miss. Trafford passes as a virtuous character before the world?"

"Madam," I responded indignantly, "Miss. Trafford's reputation is beyond suspicion. His grace, your husband, must explain everything."

The Duchess looked astonished at this answer on my part: and she turned towards the Duke, saying, "Perhaps you will explain, my lord, that which Miss. Trafford

does not on her part choose to clear up."

"My God, what can I say?" murmured the bewildered Duke of Ardleigh. "But we cannot talk here!—don't let me be seen by the other domestics!"

"As you are without your hat, my lord," said the Dutchess, "I presume that you must be temporarily residing in this house, to which I was coming for shelter. Perhaps it will not be indiscreet," she added ironically, "if I, as your wife, entered thither with you."

Again her looks were bent full of suspicion on my countenance; and I felt my cheeks burning with the blush of indignation that rose up to them, as I turned to the Duke, saying, "My lord, all this must be cleared up—everything must be told! I neither *can* nor *will* suffer on your account! Madam," I added, turning to the Duchess and speaking in a solemn voice, "there is death in that house—and this is the reason that I am temporarily there. Enter—but recollect it is the place of affliction and of mourning."

"The house of death?" ejaculated the Duchess of Ardleigh; "what can you possibly mean?"

"This, as well as everything else," I replied, "must be explained by his lordship to your grace."

The Duchess reflected for a few moments: with all her self-possession and strength of mind she might well be bewildered by this scene that was taking place. She however seemed to think that of the explanations which she was presently to receive, there need be no unnecessary witness; and she suddenly said to her maid, "Go and tell the servants that they are to be sure to stop the other carriage when it comes up. Remain you there with them. I dare say I shall not be long here. And ah! by the bye, whatsoever you may have just heard, is something that is not to be talked about.

"I understand, my lady," answered the abigail: and she turned away towards the spot where the misfortune had happened to the equipage.

CHAPTER V.

JULIET'S INFANT.

THE Duchess of Ardleigh now passed through the garden-entrance—I myself immediately following her; for the Duke, doubtless feeling like a doomed man, logged in the rear. We threaded the front garden in silence: we entered the cottage; and as the parlour door stood open, the Duchess at once turned into that room. She sat down—glanced around her—and said in accents where a slight irony appeared, "Truly this is a pretty little place—a very pretty little place; and if it were fitted up under your lordship's supervision, you have shown more taste in this respect than ever to my knowledge you displayed before."

The Duke looked exceedingly miserable and very much confused. With his ignoble countenance, his insignificant form, and his apparel plain almost to meanness, it was scarcely possible to believe that he was indeed the husband of the superb, handsome-looking, and even brilliant lady who had placed herself upon the sofa with as much case of manner as if the House belonged to her, and yet with a certain air of

dignity, as if she were about to sit in judgment over the delinquent who was fidgeting about at a little distance. I sat down with an air of claim self-possession; for now that matters had reached this crisis, in which my own reputation was at stake, I was determined that everything should be told. The reader may believe me when I proclaim the assurance that I was not inspired by the slightest sentiment of malignity towards the Duke himself: on the country I rather pitied him: but it was absolutely necessary that my good name should be spared from the breath of suspicion; and moreover, I was not without the hope that when the Duchess came to learn everything she might possibly be induced to act a generous part, and do some thing more for poor Mary Glentworth than the Duke himself might have been disposed to perform.

"Now, my lord," said the Duchess, in a tone that was ironical blandness, as if she would have added, "Pray tell your tale, and make me your dupe if you can."

"My dear," said the Duke, fidgeting about in a way which under other circumstances would have been truly ludicrous, "I think you had better let the matter drop where it is—there may be secrets. you know—I wish to God Peaseblossom was here!"

"My lord," ejaculated the Duchess, her accents being now altogether perempterv, "I insist upon explanations! Miss. Trafford, will *you* not speak? Whose house is this? why are you here? why is the Duke here? and who is dead within its walls?"

"I do indeed perceive that I must speak, my lady," I said: "for it is almost a desecration of this scene of death—"

"No, no, Miss. Trafford! let me speak!" exclaimed the Duke. "The fact is, my dear"—and he advanced with mincing gait and cajoling looks towards the Duchess—"I came across from Hastings this evening—I thought I should like a little walk into Dover—so I sent back the post-chaise that brought me from Hastings. I was coming along the road, when a mad bull ran at me—I was knocked down—Miss. Trafford happened to be passing—she kindly picked me up—"

"Good heavens, my lord!" I exclaimed, "is it possible that in the house of death—"

"Pray, Miss. Trafford," interrupted the Duchess, with an appearance of great sweetness of manner, "let his grace tell his story in his own way. Up to the point which he had reached it was eminently romantic?"

"Ah! romantic—but very alarming," responded the Duke, who evidently thought that he was making his wife believe the absurd tale he was telling her. "Well, you see, my dear," he continued, "I was brought into this house—the lady of which was so terribly frightened by seeing the mad bull rush in amongst her flowers, that she fell down—she was seized with a fit—and all was over! There's her poor daughter—"

"For shame, my lord!" I cried, now bending upon the Duke an indignant glance. Madam, I see that I must speak!"

"Indeed I think you had better, Miss. Trafford," said the Duchess, as she turned upon her husband an annihilating look of the supremest scorn and loftiest disdain.

"I am saying with a friend in this neighbourhood," I continued, —"a highly-respectable lady,

Mrs. Oldcastle of River House. Accident threw me in the way of Miss. Glentworth, who with her mother resided in this cottage. A little more than two hours back I was hastily summoned hither by the maid-servant: and on my arrival I found Mrs. Glentworth on the point of death. I likewise met his grace here; and if I have tarried until now, it was because I would not abandon the poor afflicted girl whose mother has perished before her eyes. Who Mrs. Glentworth *was*—who Miss. Glentworth *is*, it is for his grace to explain."

"I think I can understand, Miss. Trafford," said the Duchess, now showing by her looks and accents that she fully believed the tale that I had just told her.

At this instant the maid-servant entered the room, exclaiming. "Oh, Miss. Trafford! Miss. Glentworth has awoke—and she is asking for you!"

I rose—bowed to the Duchess and issued from the parlour. I was by no means sorry to leave the Duke and Duchess alone together, now that sufficient had been said to put her grace upon the right track towards eliciting the whole truth. In the passage I paused to ask the maid-servant if she had mentioned to Miss. Glentworth that there was a lady in the parlour: but she told me that she had not. I ascended to the chamber, where I found poor Mary giving way to her affliction; and I said all I could to comfort her. She entreated me to suffer her to go and pray by the couch on which lay the remains of her mother: but I conjured her to wait till the morning. Mary allowed herself to be persuaded; and thus half-an-hour passed away. At the expiration of that time I heard an equipage stop in front of the house; and I had no doubt it was the second travelling-carriage, conveying the remainder of her grace's suite. Mary was too much absorbed in her own painful reflections to notice the sounds of the vehicle: but in a few minutes it drove on—as did likewise the other; so that I concluded the latter must have been sufficiently repaired to continued its way to Dover.

I passed the rest of that night in the chamber with Mary Glentworth: but I knew that the Duke was still in the house; for shortly after the equipages had passed by, I heard him ascend to his own chamber. For several hours Mary Glentworth did not close her eyes; and not one wink of sleep did I myself obtain that night. Between six and seven o'clock in the morning slumber again afforded my poor friend a temporary relief from the bitterness of her affliction; and I then stole downstairs—for I had heard the Duke descend a short time previously.

I met him in the parlour; and he immediately said, "Well, Miss. Trafford, everything is known now—thanks to you!—for if you had only backed me in that tale which I so happily invented——"

"My lord, ceases this absurdity!' I angirily interrupted him; "and tell me, will her grace do anything for Mary Glentworth?"

"Not she indeed!" exclaimed the Duke. "She is desperately indignant—she at first talked of suing for a divorce—the Eccesiastical Court—the House of Lords—separate maintenance—and heaven knows what—until I

told her if she would only allow me——"

"To perform your duty towards your daughter, my lord?" I said, in a tone of grave inquiry.

"No—to go to Scotland for a time with Peaseblossom," he answered, "until I could be restored to her good graces——"

"But about Mary Glentworth?" I impatiently asked. "Is she to be thrown upon that benevolence which I promised to invoke for her at the hands of Mrs. Oldcastle?"

"I scarcely see what else is to be done," replied the Duke. "Pray, my dear Miss. Trafford, go presently—I am most anxious to be relieved from this suspense——"

"Yes, my lord," I interrupted him; "rest assured that I shall not delay: for I perceive that despite your solemn promise of last evening, Mary may not hope to find a friend even in her own father."

"A friend—yes!" he exclaimed, turning almost angrily round upon me. "I will allow her a couple of hundred a year——"

"And you think," I said, "that all the care which you are bound to bestow upon her is limited to a small pecuniary allowance? However, my lord, I will not argue the point with your grace; but will see whether I cannot provide for your daughter that home to find which you leave her to shift for herself."

Having thus spoken, I ascended again to Mary Glentworth's chamber. She still slept: I performed my ablutions; and the process refreshed me, for I felt ill and feverish through want of sleep and the excitement of the various scenes through which within the last twelve hours I have been dragged.

It was nine o'clock before Mary Glentworth awoke; and then I represented to her in as delicate and gentle terms as possible, that inasmuch as her uncle Mr. Glentworth (as I continued to call the Duke) was not in a position to offer her a home, I was going to speak to Mrs. Oldcastle on the subject: but I was careful not to promise I should succeed—for I knew how eccentric was the character of the old lady. Mary embraced me with a fervour as if she considered me her best if not her only friend; and I took a temporary leave of her, inwardly hoping that my self-imposed mission to Mrs. Oldcastle would be attended with success; and if not, I resolved upon persuading the Normans to receive poor Mary when the funeral should be over.

I bent my way to River House; and I at once obtained an interview with Mrs. Oldcastle. I did not choose to betray the Duke's secret: I considered it to be sacred after the pledge which I had given to the deceased Mrs. Glentworth. I therefore spoke of him only as Mrs. Glentworth-representing that he was so circumstanced as to be unable to afford his daughter a home—but that he had promised to allow her sufficient for her maintenance. Mrs. Oldcastle listened to me with an expression of countenance which for a while was perfectly inscrutable; and at length, as her rigid features relaxed into a look of kindness, she tapped me on the cheek, saying, "My dear Ellen, you are a generous-hearted girl!—much too generous to deal with all the circumstances of this cold selfish world!"

"And you will grant my request?" I exclaimed, my heart leaping with fervid hope.

"I do not know, Ellen," replied Mrs. Oldcastle. "I am only acquainted with Mary Glentworth by sight—I never in my life spoke a word to her. Before I agree to receive the young lady into my house, I must see something more of her: I must also see her father—this alleged uncle of hers. Leave me to manage——I will go and pass a few hours with Miss. Glentworth. You have been up all night: I insist upon your taking some rest. Go and lie down, my dear child; and precisely at two o'clock in the afternoon I will return. You shall then have my decision."

With these last words Mrs. Oldcastle again tapped me fondly on the cheek; and she pushed me gently from the room. My heart was relieved of a lord; for I felt convinced that she would yield to my supplication. I was indeed completely exhausted; and I ascended to my chamber, where I threw myself down upon the couch. Sleep soon visited my eyes; and I slumbered for several hours. When I awoke, it was half-past one o'clock. I knew how methodical, regular, and punctual Mrs. Oldcastle was in all her proceedings; and in half-an-hour she would therefore be with me. I made some little change in my toilet —paid Juliet a brief visit—and told her as much of the incidents of the preceding night as I had thought fit to reveal to Mr. Oldcastle. I then returned to my chamber to put on my bonnet and shawl; and I descended to the front garden to await Mrs. Oldcastle's arrival.

It was a beautiful warm day; and the nurse had brought out Juliet's infant for the first time. I took the child from the woman's arms, and sat down on a garden-bench to fondle the little innocent. As I contemplated its tiny countenance, I could not help thinking' "And you too, poor child! will grow up to be ignored and un-acknowledged by your own father, even like poor Mary Glentworth! And perhaps you too will be told some tale of how your parents died in your infancy; and you will be worse off than even Mary Glentworth—for your own mother will likewise be compelled to disavow you!"

I remember perfectly well that up to this point I had merely mused in silence; for the nurse was standing near. But perceiving that I was inclined to retain the child in my arms for a little time longer, the woman strolled away to a short distance; and then falling again into a musing mood, I was insensibly led on to give audible expression to my thoughts.

"Alas, poor child," I said, experiencing the deepest sympathy for the little innocent unconscious creature; "thine is indeed a hard fate to possess a father who cares not for thee—and to be disowned in a short time, as thou wilt be, by thine own mother! Alas, poor child! born in mystery and in shame—for Oh, it is so!—how deeply, deeply art thou to be pitied! Happy was thy mother ere she knew what love was!—happy when upon the stage she was contented with the plaudits which she elicited! But now how changed is everything for her! Here, under a feigned name has she given birth to thee—"

"Oh, my God, Ellen! is it for this that I have come hither?" were the wildly-spoken words which suddenly burst upon my ears; and I started in affright and dismay, not merely at the words

themselves, but at the voice in which they were conveyed; for I recognised it full well—it was the voice of my cousin—the object of my heart's devoted love—Henry Wakefield!

It was a wonder that I did not drop the infant from my arms, so fearfully was I galvanised—so suddenly did I start up from my seat. And behind that seat, amidst the evergreens, stood Harry Wakefield; and Oh! never shall I forget the look of despair and agony which his countenance wore as he pressed his hand to his brow, ejaculating, "My God! my God!"

"Henry! dear Henry!" I exclaimed, in a wild agony of mind: for I was at once smitten with the conviction of what hideous thought had seized upon him: "hear me, I conjure you!"

"Farewell, Ellen!" he exclaimed, in frenzied accents and with a look of kindred madness: "everything is at an end between us!"

And it was like one frantic that, dashing through the maze of evergreens, he rushed away from the spot. I endeavoured to raise my voice again—but I could not: my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth—I felt as if I were choking. A dizziness seized upon me: I had just sufficient presence of mind to deposit the infant gently upon the seat; and then sank down deprived of conciousness.

When next a gleam of reason began to steal into my brain, like the finest thread of light into the depths of a dark dungeon—I was in bed: I could not for some time recollect where. Two female forms bent over me: they spoke to me in gentle and soothing voices—the lips of each were pressed to my cheeks: but I knew not those countenances—I remembered not those voices. Then it appeared to me as if I slept again for some interval of unknown length: but when consciousness once more returned, it was with a broader gleam of light than on the former occasion: and again were those two forms there. And now I recognised the countenances that bent down and kissed me: one was that of Mrs. Oldcastle—the other that of Mary Glentworth. But Mary Glentworth *there!*—and in deep mourning! What could it all mean? The truth was gradually and delicately broken to me: I had been stretched on that bed for seven whole days and nights; and it was the evening before this day of which I am now speaking that I had obtained that first faint glimmer of returning consciousness. Yes—for a whole week I had endured all the perils of a severe fever, alternating betwixt intervals of deep trance-like torpor and the ravings of delirium. As for mary Glentworth—the funeral was over, and she had found a home beneath the roof of Mrs. Oldcastle. When I learnt this fact, I took the old lady's hand and pressed it to my lips in warm testimony of my gratitude.

In respect to myself, I soon discovered that not a suspicion was entertained relative to the real cause of my swoon in the garden and my subsequent illness. It apperead that the nurse had wandered away into the grounds at the rear of the dwelling, but she fancied that she heard a cry, and she sped back to the front garden. There she found the infant lying safe upon the bench, and myself stretched in a fainting fit upon the ground. I was borne into the house—every attention was paid me—Mrs. Oldcastle soon after arrived from her visit to Mary Glentworth—and medical assistance was sent for. The

surgeon pronounced me to be in a high state of fever; and thus, as the reader is already aware, for one whole week did I remain hovering between life and death—at one time plunged into a trance-like torpor, at another raving in delirium. But that my ravings had afforded not the slightest clue to the real cause of my swoon, nor had in any way betrayed the visit of Harry Wakefield or the inaspicious circumstances attending it, was evident enough from what Mrs. Oldcastle and Mary Glentworth proceeded to say to me.

"You passed an agitated night in the house of death, my dear Ellen," said the old lady. "you slept not a single wink—your nerves were unstrung by the sudden catastrophe which deprived your poor friend of a parent—and thus everythin g tened to excite you. It was really no wonder that your ph ysical powers should have succumbed beneath such influences!"

"Alas, my dear Ellen!" said Mary Glentworth, in a soft voice that was tremulous with emotion. as she bent down and kissed my cheek; "it was all on my account that this happened! Oh, how you have suffered for your kindness to me!—and how immeasurably would it have added to my afflict ion if I had lost you, my best friend!"

I begged Mrs. Oldcastle and Mary to leave me a little while to myself.—alleging that I felt the necessity of collecting my scattered ideas. Nor was this indeed a mere pretext: it was the truth; for never had I greater need to reflect upon the unfortunate circumstances which had so recently occurred.

When left alone, I gave free vent to my tears; for it was shocking to think how Henry had been deceived by circumstactial evidence, and how frightfully I had suffered in his estimation. I remembered how I had been musing aloud for the few minutes previous to that sudden ejaculation which had burst from his lips: I could even recall to my recollection every syllable I had thus uttered; and I had no doubt he had remained the while an unseen listener, enduring mental agonies the bare idea of which was sufficient to drive me mad. Oh! doubtless he had sought me in London—he had there learnt that I was at River House, near Dover—he had sped on the wings of love to this place to find me—and perhaps on arriving at his destination, he had first caught a glimpse of me in the garden, when thinking to afford me a most happy surprise, he had stolen nigh enough to behold a bade in my arms, and to catch all the words I was addressing unto the little innocent. These details did It picture to myself; and I though too how fearfully every spcies of circumstantial evidence had comcined to ruin me in the estimation bf Harry Wakefield! When standing amidst the evergreens, listening to the words that were flowing from my lips, numerous ideas must have flashed to his brain corroborate the dreadful suspicion which had smitten him. He must have remembered that I had concealed from his mother how I had betaken myself to the stage—and that from him likewise had I withheld the same fact, until his approaching return to England had at length elicited the avowal from me. And then too, he must have seen that there was subterfuge or duplicity in the

little manœuvres I had adopted to veil from him my sojourn at River House, and to induce him to communicate with me from Paisely, so that I should know at what precise time I might expect to meet him in London. And lastly his prejudice against the theatrical profession must have combined with all other circumstances to impress him with the very natural conviction that I had ceased to be worthy of him.

But what was I now to do? I was chained to a bed of sickness; and at least another week must elapse before I could hope to be enabled to get out into the fresh air. A fortnight must pass before I should be fit for travelling. Oh, that I were at once able to speed in search of Henry Wakefield—to find him—and to vindicate myself! Ah, but in so doing I must reveal partially if not wholly Juliet's secret So strong were the circumstances against me, that I dared not expect my cousin to believe the simple statement that it was the child of another which he had seen in my arms, unless I were to afford him corroborative proof of the tale. But how was I to do this without betraying Juliet. For a long time I reflected upon the painful subject—until at length an idea struck me. What this was, I need not at present state.

Fain would I have at once written to my cousin to implore him to suspend his judgment until I could see him: but I was too weak and feeble to hold a pen—and I did not choose to confide the history of my sorrows to any other person. I was therefore compelled to wait two or three days until I had just strength sufficient to trace a few lines upon paper. I then implored Henry, by the love which he had borne me, and by that earnest affection which I continued to experience for him, to suspend his opinion until he had heard me; for that I was innocent, and I could explain everything! I addressed the letter to him under cover the Paisley manufacturer; and my mind felt more easy when this task was accomplished.

My health was improving: for being conscious of innocence, and having faith in the justice of heaven, I felt assured that the time must sooner or later come when I could make my guiltlessness apparent to him whom I was deeply anxious to disabuse of the dreadful suspicion which he entertained. I now had an opportunity of having some conversation with Mrs. Oldcastle in respect to Mary Glentworth. She had taken a liking to the young lady: the more she saw of her, the more she was convinced of her artlessness and purity of mind; and so for from regretting that she had afforded her a home, she would have infinitely regretted the denial of an asylum to the orphan girl. She had seen the Duke of Ardleigh—but entertained not the remotest suspicion who he actually was: she believed him to be plain and simple Mr. Glentworth. She had been but little impressed in his favour; and therefore wondered not that he should seek to throw his daughter upon the friendship of others. He had promised to allow Mary two or three hundred a-year; and Mrs. Oldcastle had replied that though she herself should accepted of no payment nor reward for affording the young lady an asylum, yet that she should insist upon the fulfilment of that agreement as a means of making a future provision for Miss Glentworth. It

further appeared that the Duke, having entrusted all the arrangements for the funeral to an undertaker at Dover, had soon afterwards deparated from the cottage; so that he followed not the remains of his late mistress to the grave.

I found that Mary Glentworth was fortified with a sweet, pious resignation in respect to the loss of her mother: and I learnt that when after the funeral she had removed to River House, she had been unwearied in her attentions to me. Indeed, the amiable girl displayed sowards me as much affectionate solicitude as if she were my own sister. She had of course formed the acquaintance of Juliet, whom she only knew however as Mrs. Hall.

Mrs Oldcastle had written to the Normans to tell them that I was ill; but she did not say how *very* ill I really was, for fear lest they should set off for River House, despite her injunctions to the contrary.

The day after I wrote to Henry Wakefield, I penned a few lines to Mrs. Norman to tranquillize her mind on my behalf, and assure her that I was approaching towards covalescence.

At the expiration of a week after my return to consciousness, I was enabled to get down into the garden; supported by the arm of Mary Glentworth; and at the end of another week I found my health so much improved that I became impatient to set out on my intended journey in search of my cousin: for alas! I had received no letter from him—no reply was vouchasted to my few brief lines of earnest appeal; and yet I felt convinced he must have received my note by this time; for even if he had not returned to Paisely, Mr. Macdonald, I conjectured, must be sure to know his address.

It was now, as I have said, a fortnight after my return to consciousness—but there whole weeks since the fatal incident in the garden which had produced such dire results. The same medical man who had attended Juliet in her confinement, had been ministering unto me; and I one morning took an opportunity, when we were alone together, to address him upon a particular subject, in pursuance of the idea which I had already formed.

"Mr. Singleton," I said—for that was him name—"I wish you to do me a very particular favour; and likewise to keep the request itself a profound secret."

"Speak, Miss. Trafford," he answered; "and you will see how ready I am to serve you if it lie in my power."

I expressed my thanks for this assurance, and I went on to say, "You must now be informed that the day on which I was taken so ill, I was seen by an acquaintance of mine fondling Mrs. Hall's infant in the garden. From that circumstance scandalous stories may arise; and I wish you to permit me, if requisite, to refer to you as a means of vindicating my own character."

"Nothing, Miss. Trafford," rssponded Mr. Singleton, "can be more proper on your part, and more easy on mine. I see that the affair is delicate one—and you may rely upon my discretion."

Again I thanked him; and then I said. "But I have still another favour to ask of you. Pray do not refuse me! You must immediately recommend me change of air; and yourself must tell Mrs. Oldcastle that it is necessary. I do not conceal from you

that I have most urgent reasons for wishing to get away from River House; and Mrs. Oldcastle's anxiety on account of my health would lead her to detain me here for some time longer, unless you thus kindly aid me to emancipate myself."

Mr. Singleton looked grave, and reflected for a few moments: he then said, "It all depends, Miss. Trafford, on the place to which you disire to go—the length of the journey—the mode of travelling—and so forth. Aided by a strong constitution, you have triumphed marvellously over the peril of those ailments which beset you; and with ordinary care you will speedily be as well as ever you were. But your health must not be trifled with; and your dramatic avocations cannot immediately be resumed."

"I can assure you that I have no thought of returning to the stage for some weeks. As for the journey which I propose to undertake," I continued, "I confess it is rather a long one: but I will accomplish it by easy stages. If I be kept longer chained to this place, my anxiety of mind will only throw my back upon a sick couch."

"This is likewise to be considered," said Mr. Singleton—adding with a half smile, "We medical men are often compelled to humour our patients, as I am now disposed to deal by you. Yes—I will recommend change of air."

"And recommend it to be London," I interjected.

Again Mr. Singleton looked grave: but I plied him with so many entreaties that at length he agreed to favour my project. He went and sought Mrs. Oldcastle accordingly: and that worthy lady was soon in my chamber. She remonstrated on the ground that Hunter Street was not in the most salubrious quarter of the metropolis,—observing that if I had any friends at the West End with whom I could stay, she should perhaps be less thatI had been suficient service to the Marchioness of Campenella and the Countess of Carboni to take a slight liberty with their names; and accordingly intimated that I should be welcome at their abode. Mrs. Oldcastle offered no further objection; and it was agreed I should depart on the morrow.

I was inwardly rejoiced at the success of project—my spirits became cheered—and I indulged in the hope that the time was not now far distant when I should clear up my reputation in the presence of Henry Wakefield. The recommendation of change of air for metropolis, was not merely sufficient pretext for bidding farewell to my frinds at River House—but likewise to serve my purpose in the communication which I had to make to Mr. and Mrs. Norman relative to my intended removal.

On the following day I set out in a post-chaise for the metropolis, having affectionately embraced Mrs. Oldcastle, Juliet, and Mary Glentworth. Still feeling the effects of my recent illness, and fearful of a relapse ere I had accomplished the long journey that was before me, I only proceeded half the distance to the metropolis on this first day; and on the following one I completed the remainder of that portion of my travel. It was said early in the afternoon when I arrived in London; and I at once proceeded to hunter Street.

There I learnt that upwards of three weeks back a young gentleman, announcing himself as my cousin Mr. Wakefield, had called to see me, and that he displayed considerable disappointment on not finding me there. He was informed by the domestics that Mr. and Mrs. Norman were at Ramsgate—but that I was staying at River House near Dover. Mr. Wakefield had then hastened away upon receiving this intelligence; and therefore it was evident that he had lost little time in seeking me a Mrs. Oldcastle's abode.

From Hunter Street I repaired to the Marquis of Campanella's mansion at the West End of the town—having previously informed Mr. Norman's servants whither I was going. I was received with open arms by the Marchioness and Beatrice; and when I craved their hospitality until the next day, it was cordially vouchsafed, accompanied with the regret my sojourn beneath that roof was to be so short. I alleged as my reason for seeking a temporary asylum there the fact that the Normans were out of town, and that I did not like to be all by myself at the house in Hunter Street. I was rejoiced to see how well Beatrice was looking; and I learnt that she had heard nothing more of her husband.

On the following morning, as I was in the midst of my toilette, a lady's maid entered the chamber to infrom me that a young person who had just come from Hunter Street, wished to see me. I thought it must be one of the maids of Mr. Norman's establishment; and I desired that she might be shown up. Great was my surprise, therefore, when in a few minutes Beda bounded into the room.

Seizing my hand, she pressed it to her lips with an effusion of joy; and then she raised her large dark eyes towards my countenance in a manner which seemed most pathetically to deprecate any annoyance that I might feel at the step which she had thus of her own accord taken. But how could I possibly chide the poor girl who had shown so many proofs of fidelity, love, and devotion towards me?

"And how came you here, Beda?" I asked in a kind tone.

"Oh! I learnt, miss, that you had been ill," exclaimed the girl; "and for the last three weeks I have been longing to come to you—but I knew not where you were staying. Yesterday morning Mrs. Norman received a letter from you and I happened to overhear her reading a part of its contents to Mr. Narman. Thus I learnt you were comming to London: but I was then ignorant that you ment to stay elsewhere than in Hunter Street. I besought Mrs. Norman to suffer me to come to you: but she refused, saying that if you had wished to have me you would have intimated that desire in your letter. Oh! then I was so unhappy and miserable, and I wept so all day long—for I thought you no longer cared for me——"

"Poor Beda!" I said, tapping her cheek fondly. "Think you that I shall ever forget the immense services you rendered me the other day at Ramsgate? But proceed. I hope you did not leave Mr. and Mrs Norman without their consent?"

"See, miss," exclaimed Beda, presenting me a note: "this will doubtless explain everything."

The letter was from Mrs. Norman—in which she informed me that Beda seemed so unhappy at not being allowed to attend me

in London, that she had taken it upon herself to grant the permission which the girl so much desired. It then appeared that nothing would satisfy Beda but that she must come up by the nightcoach, so as to be with me as soon as possible. Mrs. Norman did not happen to know where the Marquis of Campanella dwelt; and thus he had bidden Beda repair in the first intance to Hunter Street, so that the inquiry might be made for her. One of the servants there knew the address of the Marquis; and Beda had lost no time in coming to me.

I gave her many kind words as a reward for her affectionate solicitude on my behalf; and then I said "I am going to tell you a very great secret, Beda: but you are so faithfull and trustworthy that I know you will keep it."

"Oh, that I will!" she exclaimed, her superb eyes becoming singularly luminous with the joy of being admitted into my confidence.

"I am going,, to set out presently on a very long journey, Beda," I continued; "and you shall accompany me. But you are not hereafter to speak of this unless I give you my free permission.

"As I would lay down my life for you." she emphatically replied, "you do not suppose that I would fail in my obedience in a matter so easy as this."

I was satisfied; and having bidden farewell to the Marquis and Marchioness of Campanella, as well as to Beatrice—whom I begged to take charge of any letters that might arrive in my absence—I entered the carriage which the Marchinoness had ordered to the railway-station. Beda accompanied me; and we set out on our journey towards the north.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING.

IT was about ten or eleven months since I was formerly at Paisley, on the occasion when I attended the deathbed of my aunt, Mrs. Wakefield. The clocks were striking five in the afternoon when I thus reached it again; and I repaired to a hotel, still attended by the faithful Beda. I had not so completely adhered to my resolve to perform the journey by easy stages, as to arrive in Paisely without the sense of much weariness, approaching even to exhaustion: but still I could not rest a moment before making inquiries for Henry Wakefield.

I penned a brief note to the effect that I had come all the way from the neighbourhood of Dover—a distance of some hundreds of miles—for the purpose of giving those explanations and affording those proofs which should convince my cousin how deeply wronged I had been by his suspicions. I claimed it as a right that he should afford me an opportunity of clearing up my character; and I entreated that no matter what change had taken place in his feelings towards me, he would not deny me this right which as a fellow-creature I demanded.

I entrusted the note to the hotel porter to take to Mr. Macdonald's manufactory or to his private residence, at whichsoever place Mr. Wakefield might be found; or at all events to prosecute his inquiries until he should discover whether my cousin were still in Paisely or not. The man set out; and the half-hour of his absence was a most anxious one for me. I had consigned Beda to the bedchamber; and I was alone in the

sitting-room which I occupied at the hotel. Wearied though I were, I could not remain seated: I kept walking about in the room, although a thousand times I said to myself that I ought to have more fortitude and composure, and that I was acting rather as a guilty than as an innocent person. Ah! but then, reader, I loved Henry!—and it was very different in having to vindicate myself before *him* from what it would have been if he were a person who was in all respects indifferent to me save with regard to the suspicion which was entertained against my character!

At length the porter returned, bringing me the announcement that he had found Mr. Wakefield at the private residence of Mr. Macdonald, and that he would be with me in a few minutes. The man retired; and I now exerted all my power to arm myself with composure. I succeeded but indifferently; for my nerves, weakened by illness, had been unstrung by the long journey and by the excitement of the thoughts which had occupied me while travelling. Indeed I was fearfully agitated; and when I heard footsteps approaching along the passage leading to the parlour, I felt a dizziness come over me as if I should faint. The door was thrown open—and the waiter announced Mr. Wakeffeld.

I sank down upon a seat: I could not give utterance to a word. My cousin appeared in the room; and the door closed behind him. His countenance was very pale, his classical well-formed lips were compressed with a severe expression: but he could not prevent a look of compassion and of lingering fondness from appearing in his soft brown eyes. All of a sudden I regained somewhat of my self-possession; and rising from my seat, I exclaimed, "Henry, you have wronged me! I swear to you that I am innocent!"

He shook his head despairingly murmuring, "Would to God that I could think so!"—and it was with difficulty that he stifled a sob which appeared to be convulsing him inwardly.

"O Henry!" I exclaimed, in a voice of reproach; "if every kind of circumstantial evidence had combined to throw a suspicion on *your* character, I should not thus prejudge you—I should at least have listened to whatsoever explanations you might have had to proffer!—and Oh! I should not suffer a whole fortnight to elapse without condescending to take the slightest notice of any letter that you might have written to me"

"In this respect, Ellen, I am blameless," replied my cousin. "I returned but this day to Paisely after an absence at Liverpool; and by an oversight the letter you wrote me from River House, was not forwarded in the interval to my address in that town. I have been like one distracted—Oh! there are so many circumstances for you to explain, that I fear—— But I will hear you, Ellen! God knows I am incapable of doing you a wilful wrong!"

He had pressed his hand to his brow when interrupting himself in the midst of his speech: for an instant he had a wild half-frenzied look; and, Oh! the bitterest pangs shot through my heart as I thus contemplated him! He sat down; and his strong efforts to maintain an air of composure were plainly visible.

"In the first place," I said, my cheeks suddenly burning at the

idea of vindicating myself on such a point, "the infant that you beheld in my arms was but a few days old: it was the child of a friend of mine; and if you cannot believe me, Henry, you may refer to Mr. Singleton at River—a medical gentleman of the highest respectability."

"Ellen," replied my cousin, in a low deep voice, "You may conceive how painful it is for me to be compelled to discourse with you on such a subject. Were it only *that* incident to which you have alluded, the explanation would suffice,and I should be ready to lay violent hands upon myself to think that I had wronged you with such a suspicion. But there are so many other circumstan ces—"

"Ah! first let us allude," I exclaimed, "to the secrecy which I observed in respect to my profession. You know that when I quitted my poor deceased aunt's home in Sheffield, it was for the purpose of obtaining a situation in London. On arriving in the metropolis, I was doomed to a terrible disappointment. A deceiver and a villain had answerrd my advertisement, and had deluded me thither. But at the very moment when I was reduced to despair, heaven threw me in the way of a friend—an old schoolfellow—Juliet Norman. With the Normans I found a home—that home where you recently sought me in Hunter Street. You know that they belong to the stage; and thus you may account for my embarking in a profession which seemed the only one open to me. And Oh! was I to blame that I sought to eat the bread of mine own industry, instead of remaining dependent upon the humble means of your mother?—or was it a fault if entertaining some silly little vanity, and perhaps having a presentiment of that fame which I have since acquired, I resolved to cherish my secret until the moment when I might proudly say to my aunt and my cousin, 'You have heard of Miss. Trafford, the celebrated actress who is acquiring wealth and renown: I am she!'"

"Proceed, Ellen!" said my cousin, evidently interested, but still with a profoundly-mournful look.

"Alas! I was not allowed to experience that joyous occasion which I had so longingly anticipated," I continued;—"it was not permitted me to act thus towards your mother! Suddenly was I summoned to her death-bed. I arrived at your cottage—I stole gently up the stairs—I heard what was passing between yourself and my poor aunt; and then, my God! for the first time I learnt how strong were her prejudices against the profession which I had adopted. You know, Henry, that a few minutes afterwards she was no more: I had not a opportunity to confess the real truth. I subsequently found that you yourself were imbued with the same prejudice—But why should I recapitulate," I suddenly interrupted myself, "much of what I have already told you in that long letter of mine wherein I at length avowed the truth?"

"And I will admit," answered my cousin, "that when I read that letter—and when I perused the newspaper-*critiques* which it contained—I was overjoyed: I felt proud of you, Ellen: all prejudice had vanished—and I thought of you as one who had achieved a brilliant reputation in an incredibly-short space of time and

in spite of all obstacles. I flew to the metropolis to meet you: but you were not in Hunter Street. I learnt too that you had gone away with the intention of remaining absent for some weeks;—and yet you had desired me to write to you in Hunter Street, as if you were still to be there! But that was only a trivial incident at the time! and I paused not to reflect upon it. I sped to over: thence I walked out to River House—and Oh, Ellen! when I perceived your form seated on the garden-bench, my heart leapt for joy within me! I meant to surprise you with my presence: but I stole near, what words reached me!"

"Recall them all," I said, "and you will see Henry, that they were addressed to the child of a hapless friend of mine—one who has been cruelly betrayed—"

"Ellen," interrupted my cousin, "if this were the case, wherefore all that mystery in which you shrouded yourown proceedings? Why make me believe that you were expecting me in Hunter Street when you were actually at River House?"

"Because, Henry," I replied with confidence, "it was necessary to shield the secret of my unfortunate and betrayed friend even from *you*. Thus it was to avert the chance of your visit to River House that I adopted a little subterfuge that was venial enough when rendered necessary by the claims of friendship in another quarter. But enough, Henry! I have now vindicated myself: and I have told you to whom to refer. Did it not offend my pride—my modesty as a woman—my innocence, to continue in this strain, I would remind you of the fact that up to the instant I left London I regularly appeared upon the stage; and my servant who is now with me, could tell you that only three or four days before you beheld me at River House I was with the Normans at Ramsgate."

"Ellen, Ellen,! forgive me!" exclaimed Henry. "My God! forgive me! I have been half mad!"—and he threw himself weeping at my feet.

Oh! what emotions swelled within me as I raised him from his suppliant posture; and the next instant we were clasped in each other's arms. In the most impassioned language did Henry Wakefield implore my pardon; and over and over again did I assure him of it. Bitterly did he upbraid himself for the suspicions which he had entertained: but I said all I could to console him, admitting that circumstantial evidence had been strong against me.

"Ah! you know not," he vehemently exclaimed, "what in my madness I have done!"

"Good heavens Henry!" I asked, smitten with consternation, "what do you mean!"

"Oh, that I should be compelled to tear myself away from you again!" he cried; "but there is no help for it! When believing, Ellen, that everything was at an end between us, I sped back to Paisley—I entereated Mr. Macdonald to suffer me to return on his account to the United States—and I showed him how I could materially advance his interests. He agreed: and I at once sped to Liverpool to make all the requisite arrangements. These I hurried on—for the distracted state of my mind would not suffer me to remain patiently in England: I held the country in abhorrence—"

"If you have done nothing more than this, Henry," I said, "be

comforted! You can renounce your engagement with Mr. Macdonald——"

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "I am in honour bound to adhere to it. Moreover. there are agreements signed—"

"Then by all means fulfill them I answered and with downcaste looks, while my cheeks were clothed in blushes, I added, "We can wait, Henry, as we have already waited: and if you have confidence in your own love, believe me when I assure you that mine is unalterable!"

He folded me in his arms, again giving way to the bitterest self-reproaches having mistrusted me: and again I had to take upon myself the part of a consoler. He grew tranquillized; and we conversed more deliberately upon our plans. He calculated that his approaching absence from England would be for at least a twelvemonth—at the expiration of which time he hoped to be in the possession of a considerable sum of money as his to embark for Mr. Macdonald. I asked him to tell me frankly and sincerely whether he had any objection that I should remain upon the stage?—and he at once replied, "After all that has occurred, Ellen it would be nothing less than a downright insult if I were to beseech you to withdraw from a profession through whose ordeal of temptations you have already passed with so much credit to yourself. No my dear girl—continue to pursue that profession which you love and in which you are acquiring so much fame. I have already told you, Ellen, I felt proud of knowing that she who was the idol of my heart had achived so grand a success!"

I was much rejoiced by the manner in which Henry now addressed me; and I thought it right to tell him that I had a father living—that this father had been both criminal and unfortunate—that he was sincerely penitent for his misdeeds—and that he was residing in seclusion in France. But I did not reveal to my cousin the peculiar circumstances which had gradually led me on to discover that the so-called Mr. Croft was the author of my being; for if I had entered into those details it would have been necessary to trench upon the circumstances which involved Juliet's secret. My father was the late Mr. Wakefield's brother, and consequently Henry's uncle, I considered that my cousin had a had a right to be informed of the existence of that relative; and I had moreover received a painful lesson teaching me to avoid in future the unnecessary retention of any secret. Harry listened with astonishment to the intelligence which I thus communicated, and I said to him, "You will not think the worse of me for possessing such a father?'

"Oh, conceive not such an idea, my beloved Ellen!" he exclaimed. "How is it possible that you can be rendered responsible for the deeds of others, no matter how nearly they may be connected with you?"

I then proceeded to inform my cousin that the very Mrs. Oldcastle of whom so much had been said, was likewise a connexion of ours; and here again was a subject of surprise for Henry Wakefield, as he had never even heard his mother speak of such a family.

With reference to the numerous adventures which I had experienced through the persecutions of

Edwin St. Clair, I said but little; for I feared that if now revealed everything I should only be torturing my cousin with apprehensions for my future welfare — which apprehensions might accompany him across the Atlantic and haunt him during the twelvemonth of his absence. I nevertheless informed Henry that I had received a proposal of marriage from Captain St. Clair, whose fame as an orator in the House of Commons was so widely spread; and I added that in consequence of my refusal I had converted Captain St. Clair into a bitter enemy. I also whispered to my cousin that I had received a similar proposal from the Marquis of Dalrymple, the heir to a dukedom; and I said, "It is through no idle vanity, my dear Henry, that I mention these circumstances: it is only to afford you additional proofs of the constancy and fidelity of my attachment towards yourself."

"Oh, Ellen!" he exclaimed, "you have rejected these brilliant offers on my account—and I who have displayed so much ungenerous suspicion in return! Ah, my conduct savours of the blackest ingratitude——"

"Speak not thus, Henry," I interrupted him, "or I shall regret that I have revealed those facts to your ears Yet after having been suspected," I added, in a gentler voice, "it is sweet for me to be enabled to afford you these proofs of my unchanged and unchangeable love!"

"And henceforfh, Ellen," replied my cousin, "the whole study of my life shall be to ensure your happiness. Yes--doubtless you have received brilliant offers; and you will yet receive others; for you are as beautiful as you are talented, and as intelligent as you are amiable. Oh! would that I had some prospect of achieving reputation and wealth on my own side!—but I fear that when the day comes which is to unite us, no more to part, it will be but a humble bridegroom who will conduct you to the altar!"

"You will at least bear the reputation of an honourable man, Henry." I replied: "whatsoever you possess—be it much or little—will have been earned by your own honest industry;—and when we throw the contents of our purses into a common stock, we shall not pause to examine who may have contributed the most".

Thus Henry and I sat conversing until he deemed it prudent to take his dparture,—promising to return on the following day; and he left in a state of mind very different from that which I experienced when entering Paisely a few hours back. I slept sweetly and serenely that night; and when any sense of fatigue. Indeed when I looked at myself in the glass. I was surprised as well as rejoiced at the improvement which had taken place in my aspect.

I was not altogether sorry that my union with Henry was yet to be postponed for a twelvemonth—although I regretted the necessity of a complete separation for such a period. But in respect to the postponement of our marriage, I thought that it was perhaps all for the best. as we were still both very young—I only nineteen and my cousin twenty-one; and moreover, as he had a prospect of gaining some little money during the ensuing twelvemonth, I knew that it would better suit the manly independence of his spirit that he should

possess a purse of his own, and not be altogether indebted to his wife for the means of existence. Besides, I wished him to gain as large an exprience of the world as possible—so as completely to efface whatsoever little prejudices might have been instilled into his mind during the earlier period of his life. Thus, for these various reasons, I was for from being displeased at the necessity of procrastinating the happy day which would given me a legal protector in Henry Wakefield.

Shortly after breakfast he came to me at the hotel: he had informed Mr. Macdonald of my presence in Paisley and of the engagement which subsisted between us: the worthy manufacturer had sent me a message to the effect that his wife and daughters would call upon me in the course of the day, and that I must dine at his house in the evening. Henry had yet three or four days to remain at Paisley; and I was resolved to tarry there likewise until he took his departure: but I did not purpose to accompany him to Liverpool, for fear lest an occasion should be given for the wishperings of scandal. Mr. Macdonald's wife and daughters called upon me in the afternoon: they were amiable good- hearted ladies, and proud as well as delighted to from my acquaintance. I passed a happy evening at their house; for Henry himself was there—and in his society how could I be otherwise than happy? Mr. Macdonald took an opportunity of assuring me that he had every reason to be satisfied with my cousin, to whose intelligence and perseverance he was indebted for the recovery of a very large sum of money which had been owed him by his New York agents, who had fallen into difficulties. But it appeared that Henry had so judiciously managed the business entrusted to him that he had enabled those agents note only to meet their liabilities but also to save themselves from total bankruptcy, Mr. Macdonald added that he had such perfect confidence in Henry's rectitude, intelligence, and business-like habits, he was now on the point of entrusting him with the management of a very considerable speculation, the result of which might prove most lucrative to my cousin as well as to the manufactuer himself—but that the former was guaranteed against all the consequences of loss. I was delighted to hear Henry thus favourably spoken of, and I now comprehended how it was actually a point of honour with him to carry out the agreements he had made with his kind and confiding patron. Before this little conversation between myself and Mr. Macdonald ended, he hinted to me that if the enterprise on which my cousin was bent, should prove successful and realize the hopes he had held out, there was every chance that he might be taken into partnership with his patron.

The time passed quickly away—as quickly as it always does when happily spent; and the day arrived on which I was to bid farewell. He comprehended the reason which prevented me from accompanying him to Liverpool; and I saw by his looks that he approved of it. We embraced each other fervidly: again and again did we embrace: we exchanged the warmest protestations of unalterable affection—and we separated! For the remainder of that day I was dull and unhappy enough, so that I could scarcely

reconcile myself to the philosophy of those reasonings which had at first induced me to consider that the postponement of our marriage was all for the best. But when the following day came, and my mind was more tranquillized by the effects of the night's rest, I again viewed the matter in the same light as I had previously done; and I said to myself, "Henry will be successful in this new enterprise—I am confident that he will! And if so, how rejoiced shall we be for having made the temporary sacrifice of our more selfish feelings!"

I now prepared to quit Paisely. I had already hinted to Beda that the object of my visit to that town was to see my cousin—but that this circumstance was included in the secrecy that she was to maintain with reference to the whole proceeding. Beda faithfully promised to obey all my injunctions; and the devoted girl was rejoiced to see me so happy as I had been since that memorable evening of explanations with Henry Wakefield. I took leave of the Macdonald family, and we set out on our return southward.

We arrived at Birmingham without any incident worthy of mentioned: it was about seven o'clock in the evening when we reached that great manufacturing town; and there we were to pass the night. Mr. Singleton, the surgeon at River, had given me a prescription for some medicine which he had enjoined me to take for some little time until I should find my strengh completely restored; and I was too careful of my health to neglect that well-meant advice. After having partaken of dinner at the hotel where I put up, I sent Beda out to a chemist's to get the prescription made up; for I had exhausted the last supply of the medicine ere I left Paisely. It was at about half-past eight that I thus despatched Beda on her errand; and I sat either engaged with my own thoughts, or else reading a local newspaper, for upwards of an hour, when it suddenly struck me as somewhat singular that Beda has not return to the room. Still I thought that she might have taken the medicine to my bed-chamber, and that she was perhaps in her own room, which communicated with my sleeping-apartment. Thither I proceeded: but Beda was not there—neither could I perceive the medicine. I descended to the sitting-apartment—rang the bell and inquired of the waiter whether my maid had return from an errand on which I had sent her upwards of an hour back? He said that he would see: but in a few minutes he reappeared, with the intimation that he could not find my maid anywhere in the hotel. I merely bade him direct that she should be sent to me when she returned; and in his presence I bitrayed no emotion at her prolonged absence.

I thought to myself that Beda must have some very good motive for thus remaining away; and remembering the recent incidents at Ramsgate, I could not possibly conceive anything to her disadvantage. But I feared lest some new plot might be hatching against myself—though I felt confident that if this were the case, and she had found a clue to it, she would likewise discover the means of baffling it. Another half-hour passed: it was now ten o'clock—and still she returned not. I was growing exceedingly uneasy; for I remembered that the cottage where

Zarah and her grandmother had recently dwelt, was at no great-distance from Birmingham; and I thought it possible that Beda's absence might be in some way connected with the old gipsy. I waited another half-hour with increasing anxiety: it was now midway between ten and eleven o'clock; and I could endure this state of suspense no longer. I again rang the bell, and inquired if my maid had returned? Still the answer was in the negative; and now I did not endeavour to conceal my uneasiness. The waiter suggested that possibly my maid might have some friends in Birmingham, whom she had gone to visit. I affected to be satisfied with this explanation: for what else could I say? what else could I do?

Time passed on—midnight came—and still Beda had not returned. I felt so seriously uneasy that I apprehended my sensations would produce a relapse, and I should be thrown upon a sick bed in a strange place where I was without friends. I thought of a thousand schemes—of hiring a vehicle at once and proceeding to the roadside cottage on the way to Embledon—of repairing to a magistrate—of wandering out on foot through the streets, in search of the lost one: but to nothing definite could I settle my mind. I sat up till near one o'clock; and then, thoroughly exhausted, I retired to rest. An uneasy sleep visited me. I was haunted by painful dreams; and when I awoke in the morning I felt ill and feverish.

As I looked around the room, I perceived that the door of communication with the inner chamber was open; and I had perfect recollection of having closed it ere seeking my couch. Was it possible that Beda had returned? I sprang from the bed—rushed into the adjecent chamber—and to my joy discovered the object of my anxiety calmly slumbering in her couch. So great was my delight that I stopped down and kissed her with a degree of fervour that had little regard for the slumber in which she was wrapped;—and she opened her large dark eyes.

"Ah, my dear mistress!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms round my neck: "how you must have suffered on my account!"

"Indeed I have, Beda!" I responded. "I know not now how to act—and if I had not now found you here I should not have suffered many hours to pass without adopting energetic measures for your discovery. When did you return?"

"It was about three in the morning when I reached the hotel," she replied. "Knowing that my absence must have occasioned strange suspicious amongst the domestics of the establishment, I told the porter who let me in, that I had chanced to fall in with some relatives, in whose company I had been; and to give a colour to my story, I expressed the hope that I should not be chided by my mistress. The man has therefore by this time repeated the tale to his fellow-domestics; and thus my absence is so far accounted for."

"But now tell me, Beda," I exclaimed, full of anxiety, "what has been the real cause of this absence of yours? Or perhaps you wish to sleep longer—and you shall tell me presently—"

"No miss—I have slept sufficiently," she replied; "and I am sure that you must be dying with

curiosity. But perhaps you suspected that there must be some strong reason—"

"I felt confident that you were incapable of absenting yourself wilfully or improperly," I hastily interjected: and then, having thrown on a morning wrapper, I sat down by the side of Beda's bed.

"Look at these two boxes," said the young girl, her luminous eyes darting upon me one of those strange looks which were so incomprehensible for any one who did not rightly understand her disposition, or who had not positive proof of her sincerity and trustworthiness.

As she spoke, she produced from beneath her pillow a couple of little tin boxes; and opening their lids, she showed me that one contained a number of small lozenges, about the size of coffee-beans, and of a similar colour. The other box likewise contained things like lozenges: but these were of a light pinky hue. I gazed upon Beda with astonishment,—wondering what these articles could possibly have to do with that mysterious absence of hers which had yet to be explained.

The girl's countenance grew not merely serious—there was a certain deep solemnity in her look: but at the same time a visible shudder swept over her sylphid form, as she said to me in slow measured accents, " These brown lozenges contain poison : these pink ones are a complete antidote !"

" Good heavens, Beda !" I ejaculated, my whole frame quivering with horror : but my ideas at once settled upon St. Clair, Lady Lilla Essendine, and the old gipsy.

" Yes, miss—I have told you truly," continued Beda ; " and again have I been fortunate enough to fathom a plot which was laid against your life."

" Oh, I suspected that your absence must have some motive of this kind !" I exclaimed. "But those wretches who are thus seeking my death !—it has now indeed become time that I should act not merely upon the defensive—

" Listen to me," interupted Beda ; " and hear all that I have to say : it will then be time to reflect upon the course which you may decide upon pursuing. But —However," she interrupted herself, " let me tell my tale. I was returning through the streets last evening, after having procured your medicine at the chemist's when I suddenly found myself face to face with the old gipsy, Zarah's grandmother—Dame Betty, as we call her. I showed but little astonishment, and was careful not to betray the slightest annoyance at this encounter ; for I could in a moment tell by the dame's countenance that she had some particular reason on her own part for being gratified at the meeting. Thus it instantaneously flashed to my mind that whatsoever her objects might be, I should do well to listen to them, and with apparent readiness lend myself to them likewise, if asked to do so.

'Why, you are with Miss. Percy !' Dame Betty almost immediately said; and she looked me very hard in the face, as if to assure herself to what extent she could trust me, or how deeply I might be attached to your interests.--'Oh' yes,' I answered, with an off-hand air: 'did you not know it before'—'I only knew,' responded Dame Betty 'that you had accepted service with some lady: but Zarah did not tell me who she was. She had doubtless her own

good reasons for what she was doing when she got you into Ellen Percy's service: for though she has separated from me and made herself a lady, yet as a matter of course we continue to row in the same boat.'—All the while she was thus speaking, Dame Betty continued to regard me fixedly; and therefore I knew very well that she said those things as a means of probing my mind, and to ascertain whether what she was throwing out at random was substantially correct.—'Yes,' I answered with an air of the most perfect sincerity, 'Zarah had her reasons for getting me, through some indirect channel, into Miss. Percy's service; and I can assure you,' I added, throwing a look of wicked significancy at the dame, "I keep a very sharp watch upon Miss. Percy's movements,'—'No doubt, no doubt,' rejoined Dame Betty, with a low chuckling expression of her satisfaction. 'Zarah is always afraid lest Miss. Percy should turn suddenly round upon Captain St. Clair. Besides, Ellen Percy has somehow or another got hold of secrets which render her dangerous; and Zarah trembles for her own sake and for mine also. Is it not so?'—'Ah, dame,' I replied, 'I do not know the motives which actuated Zarah all I can say is that the instructions she gave to me seemed completely to tally with everything you have just said.'—All this while Dame Betty kept eyeing me with the keenest scrutiny: and as you perceive, my dear miss, I was careful to say only just sufficient to inspire her with the completest confidence in me; but I would not give utterance to a single unnecessary word, nor appear to know too much of reasons and motives, for fear lest by a single inadvertence I should excite the dame's suspicion."

"You acted most wisely, Beda," I said. "And now pray continue! I am full of impatience: but do not abridge your narrative—tell it in your own style—and give me every particular."

"Dame Betty was evidently full of confidence in me," continued Beda; "and it was likewise apparent enough to my comprehension that she flattered herself she had completely fathomed all Zarah's motives in getting me into your service. She proceeded to say, 'I saw Miss. Percy and yourself alight from a hackney-fly at the hotel : where did you come from?' 'From Manchester,' I readily answered—'And what has your mistress been doing there?' inquired Dame Betty.—'Merely visiting the manager of the local theatre,' I rejoined, 'with a view, I suppose, to a dramatic engagement.'—'And do you like Miss. Percy?' asked the dame, now fixing her eyes upon my countenance with even a still more penetrating keenness than hitherto.'—'I am perfectly indifferent with regard to her,' I answered : 'perhaps if I did not know that she was an enemy of yours and Zarah's, I might be inclined to like her a little : but as it is, the feeling is rather otherwise.'—'Could you possibly absent your self for a few hours ?' inquired Dame Betty, 'without the knowledge of your mistress ?'—'Oh, yes, to be sure,' I readily exclaimed : ' though perhaps it would be better that I should first run into the hotel and invent some excuse for so absenting myself.'—'If this is not absolutely necessary,' rejoined the dame, 'I had much rather you should come with me at once. I want to speak

to you particularly: we cannot talk in the streets; and there is no place in Birmingham to which I can conduct you for the business that I have in hand.'—,Well then,' I at once answered, 'I can come with you immediately. Miss. Percy is tired with her journey; she will go to bed early; and she never asks for me of an evening.'—'Come, then,' said the old woman: and she began leading the way through the streets of the town. You understand, my dear miss, why I so promptly agreed to go with her. I was afraid that if I first of all insisted on the necessity of returning to the hotel, a suspicion might be excited in her mind; she would possibly be put upon her guard; and she might either deal more reservedly with me, or else change her mind and reject my services altogether. I of course knew that my absence for several hours would render you uneasy: but still I thought it better that you should endure the temporary vexation of suspense than that I should loss the opportunity of penetrating into whatsoever fresh designs the vile old dame might be harbouring against your peace and security."

"You did well, Beda." I said: "you acted for the best—and your conduct was marked by the strictest policy and prudence, as well as by the most friendly considerations towards myself. And now proceed."

"Dame Betty led me to a little public-house, quite on the outskirts of the town; and there she had a covered cart and an old horse waiting for her. The equipage was a wretched, mean, and shabby one, as you may easily suppose—just such as many travelling gipsies are accustomed to use. The horse was soon harnessed: we took our seats in the cart,—Dame Betty performing the functions of driver. We must have been pretty nearly two hours in performing the dozen miles or so which lay before us until the dame's cottage was reached. A young woman, belonging to the dame's tribe, received us at the door. This was the female who supplied my place when I was introduced, miss, into your service. The dame led me into the parlour; and when the young woman had put up the cart and horse in the old stable adjoining, the dame told her that she might go to bed, as her services were not required any more for the night. Then Dame Betty produced provisions and liquor: but she did not eat or drink much, for she was intent on opening her designs to me;—and as for myself, I partook not at all of the prevender set upon the table. She again questioned me in respect to my feelings towards yourself. I replied in a strain similar to that in which I had previously spoken of you; and as if quite in a casual manner, I threw out hints that I was becoming wearied of your service, that I hoped Zarah would soon withdraw me from it, for that I longed to be my own mistress, to get out into the open country and to lead the unrestrained happy life of a gipsy. Without appearing to pay any particular attention to the dame's looks, I nevertheless furtively watched the effect which these words produced; and I saw that they had accomplished my purpose by fully confirming the trust she was previously disposed to place in me. Yet she was evidently cautious in making her approaches towards the final

development of her views: she no doubt fancied that though my mind was plastic enough in her hands, yet that she must not proceed too rudely nor abruptly in modelling it to her aims, for fear lest she should shock any latent good principle still remaining within me. Therefore she began to speak insidiously and darkly relative to yourself: I threw out an occasional word to give her just sufficient encouragement to proceed: and in a little while she went on with a gradual abandonment of restraint and reserve. She told me that I could not possibly hope to be freed from the shackles of my present service so long as you remained in existence; she likewise indirectly strove to work upon my fears by telling me that if you were suddenly to adopt an overt hostile attitude towards those whom you knew to be your enemies, your vengeance would include me within its circle, inasmuch as you could not possibly fail to discover that I was an agent of those enemies and a spy upon your actions. At last she came to the point——and here my sweet mistress, I shudder to repeat the dreadful things——"

"I understand you, Beda!" I said, shuddering also "The vile infamous wretch proclaimed the expediency, for many reasons, of putting me out of existence!"

"Yes, miss—it was so," responded Beda "I seemed to fall into her views: I first hesitated sufficiently to give a better colouring to my final assent; and the wicked woman was completely duped by the course which I adopted. She then produced the little box containing the brown lozenges; and she bade me dissolve one daily in your coffee or tea, whichsoever you might partake of—or in your soup—or in whatsoever article of food might be convenient for the purpose. In short, from the explanations she gave me, I found that those seeming coffee-berries contained a slow poison—a poison which was inevitable in its effects, but which produced no outward symptoms that could lead even the most skilful physician to suspect its inward presence. As I listened to these faithful revealings, most carefully controlling my emotions the while, several thoughts flashed through my brain. There was this woman in possession of a fearful weapon which dealt death slowly, insidiously, imperceptibly, and in a way to defy suspicion. If after a time she found that I had failed to administer it unto you, she might devise other means to introduce the poison into your food. I had somewhere read or heard that there is an antidote for every poison; and I was resolved, if possible, to obtain the means of neutralizing this one, and therefore said to her, 'Your instructions, Dame Betty, shall be followed out: but I am afraid that if will be scarcely possible for me to accomplish them without danger to myself. Miss. Percy is in the habit of taking her breakfast in her chamber; and when she has finished, I sit down there to my own meal. If I were to refuse, for instance, to drink the coffee of which she had been partaking, it would excite suspicion'—I devised other pretexts likewise in furtherance of the end which I had in view.—'This matter is easily settled,' said the dame; and producing from a cupboard another tin box, she showed

me these pink-tinted lozenges- 'Here,' she continued, 'is an antidote for every possible poison with the one exception of prussic acid. But for every venom which is not instantaneous in its effects, each of these lozenges contains a neutralizing ingredient. Fear not therefore to carry out my instructions. If there be death in one box, there is assuredly life in the other. I will convince you. Half-a-dozen of these brown lozenges would produce death in a few hours. See! I will eat double that quantity.'—Having thus spoken, the vile hag crammed a dozen of the brown lozenges into her mouth, and sat for a few minutes crunching and sucking them. Then she went through the same process with an equal number of the pink lozenges; and when she had finished, she said with a diabolical chuckle, 'Now, my dear Beda, do you believe me?'—'I never doubted you, I responded. 'I only wished to make myself safe; and, since you have given me the antidote for my own use, I have no farther objection to administer the bane as you have directed.'—The old woman returned to her cupboard; and thence she produced two small canisters, from the respective contents of which she filled up the two tin boxes from which she had taken the lozenges that she herself had eaten. She gave me those boxes; and she then went forth to prepare the old cart again to bring me back to Birmingham. The horse was however so tired that he went but slowly: and thus, what with the hours lost in these journeys to and fro, and the length of time I was detained at the cottage, I did not reach the hotel until three o'clock this morning, as I have already told you. When parting from Dame Betty, I promised, with an air of the most perfect sincerity, to fulfil all her instructions; and she said to me with a significant look. 'There are sixty brown lozenges in the tin box: there are as many pink ones. In less than two months from the present time I shall expect to hear of the death of Miss. Percy!'—Oh my dear mistress, it was with difficulty I could prevent myself from flying like a tigress at the throat of the vile hag, shrieking for assistance, and consigning her to the custody of the law's officials. It required a preterhuman power on my part to perform a last act of dissimulation, and to assure her that as far as it lay with me her design should be executed. And thus we separated."

Beda's eyes had flashed forth vivid lightnings as she gave utterance to those concluding ejaculations which expressed so much abhorrence towards the infamous woman: and I again embraced her for the friendship which she had displayed on my account,—renewing likewise my compliments for the politic course which she had adopted.

"But now, Beda," I said, reverting to a topic which had been before touched upon between us; "the detestable wickedness of my enemies has reached a point at which it is impossible for me to romain any longer quiescent. Everything must be made known-the aid of the law must be invoked against these fiends in human form——But you look deeply distressed, Beda?"

"I have sworn to Zarah—sworn in the most solemn and sacred manner," replied the young girl, with looks and accents half-mournful, half-entreating, "that in

whatsoever I might do to succour you—in whatsoever I may be enabled to accomplish with a view of a shielding and protecting you—I will carefully guard against any exposure. Methinks you have a friendship for Zarah—from what she said to me she must have some little claims upon your gratitude—and though I myself, dear miss, should be unwilling to assert any such claim on my own part, because I would cheerfully make any sacrifice of feeling—yes, even the sacrifice of life itself to insure your safety or to fulfil your wishes—yet, on the other hand——"

"Enough, Beda!" I exclaimed. 'After the manner in which you have just been speaking to me—and still more after the manner in which you have acted towards me, it is impossible that I can do anything to give you pain! Besides, I must not make you violate an oath; and in respect to Zarah, 'tis true that I am under the deepest obligations to her—I could not possibly prove ungrateful:—whatever her motives may be I shall not pause to inquire even though the medium of conjecture—I am bound to, respect them."

"And then too," observed Beda solemnly, "amidst the sublime truths which you yourself dear miss, have taught me is there not one which is perhaps more deeply impressed upon my mind than any other?—the one which teaches me that innocence and virtue must triumph in the long run over the machinations the wicked—that the latter will be in the end discomfited—and that they will sooner or later trip and fall over the ruggedness of the tortuous paths whichtheythemselves have made."

"Yes, Beda—this is true," I answered, gazing upon her with affectionate interest and admiration as there seemed to be divine light in her eyes while she thus spoke; and that holy lustre shed its beams over her transcendantly-beautiful countenance.

"Besides," she continued, now reverting to more worldly and more matter-of-fact concerns, "there is one immence point gained from the incidents of the past night. You posses an antidote for almost every poison; and there are two ways in which this fact is to be looked upon as a subject for self-gratulation. In the first place, it must in the course of time become apparent to your enemies that I have failed, for some reason or another, to administer the poison: if they suspect my fidelity towards them, they may seek other means of accomplishing the same end; but the antidote is in your possession! In the second place, if they *do* believe that I have proven faithless to them, they may suppose likewise that I have given you this antidote; and in that case they will deem it useless to renew this fearful phase of their machinations. Thus, in every way a manifest advantage has been gained on our side—while a proportionate defeat will have been experienced on the other."

"True, Beda!" I said: and I found that I had as much reason to admire the intelligence as to appreciate the friendship and the fidelity of this young creature: so that I was more than ever rejoiced at having obeyed the impulse which in the first instance led me to take her into my service; and a secret voice appeared to whisper in my soul that I was now reaping a reward for a good deed which I had performed.

I bade Beda dispose of the box of poisoned lozenges in a manner which should place them beyond the reach of human hands; and I myself took possession of the pink ones constituting the antidote. I endeavoured to persuade her to remain a few hours longer in bed after the fatigue she had experienced on the preceding night; but she declared that she was completely refreshed by the slumber she had already enjoyed: she accordingly rose and performed her toilet. I took an opportunity during breakfast-time of saying something to the waiter which should prevent from entertaining any opinion prejudicial to Beda's character on account of her protracted absence from the hotel at such unseemly hours; and the man was satisfied by the voluntary explanation which I thus threw out. I should observe that much through I had suffered from anxiety and suspense for so many long hours on account of Beda's disappearance—and much though I had feared that the effect would be prejudicial to my health—yet the joy experienced at her return had produced a most salutary reaction in me, and I was fully prepared for my journey to the metropolis.

Attended by Beda, I proceeded to the railway-station; and as I chose to keep her with me while travelling, I equired two places in a first-class carriage. We were consigned to a compartment in which there was only one other passenger besides ourselves: and this was an elderly man of somewhat haughty and aristocratic appearance. Just before the train started a domestic in a handsome livery came up to the window, and with a respectful touch of his hat inquired "whether his lordship had any additional instructions to give him?"

The reply was in the negative: the lacquey retired; the steam-whistle sent its shrill note shrieking and screaming through the immense station—the train rolled on—and we were soon proceeding with the accustomed velocity of 'an express" towards the capital.

CHAPTER VII.

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THE RAILWAY TRAIN.

From the manner in which the lacquey had addressed our aristocratic looking fellow-traveller, it was evident that he was a nobleman. He was perhaps about sixty years of age—of a very floried complexion, with a short neck, and altogether an apopletic appearance yet in spite thereof there was a certain air of distinction about him, as I have already said, which prevented me from being at all surprised on learning that he was of patrician rank. For a few moments after we had taken our seats, he surveyed Beda with considerable attention and interest; but he was unable to behold much of my countenance—for I had my veil down. The nobleman spoke not a word; and soon after the train started he drew forth from his pocket a newspaper: but every now and then I observed that he looked over it to take another survey of Beda—though I should add that there was nothing rude nor insolent in the mute attention which he bestowed upon her.

We had proceeded a considerable distance—and I knew that we could not be many miles away

from Rugby—when the newspaper glided down from the nobleman's hands, and a sound which for an instant I thought to be a moan, came from his lips. He was lying back in his seat; and I then fancied that he had sunk into slumber. But still there was a floating uneasiness in my mind: I lifted my veil—I contemplated him earnestely—the floridness of his complexion had become enhanced into a fearful redness—and he was slightly moving as if under the influence of pain.

"My lord," I cried. "is anything the matter?—are you unwell?"

There was no answer; and I therefore felt convinced that he was stricken by apoplexy.

"Call—shriek—scream from the window!" I exclaimed to Beda; "agitate your kerchief! The train must be stopped!"

Beda hastended to obey me; but at that instant the train plunged into a tunnel, through which it went roaring, crashing dashing on, with such a din—the continuous scream of the whistle mingling with the other deafending sounds—that Beda's cries were lost in the tremendous noise. There was a lamp in the roof of the carriage; and in the meanwhile I was not idle. I had rushed towards the nobleman immediately upon comprehending his perilous position; and while still giving utterance to my hasty instructions to Beda, I was tearing off his neckcloth and raising him up to a more comfortable position. Beda went on screaming and shrieking: but she could not compete with the shrill cry of the railway whistle; and though I was dreadfully alarmed lest the unfortunate nobleman should expire before assistance could possibly be obtained, yet I did not for a moment lose my presence of mind. I had at some time or another read just sufficient of the treatment of apoplexy in the absence of medical succour, to know what treatment to adopt. I kept the nobleman with the head and shoulders elevated, retaining the former in such a way as to prevent any sudden bend of the neck: I had taken off his neckcloth—I unbuttened his shirtcollar. The window next to him was at first closed; but this I let down so as to admit as much air as possible.

Such was the state of affairs inside our compartment of the railway-carriage, when the train emerged from the tunnel; and now Beda's screams and shrieks attracted attention. But in the first instance it was only the notice of passengers in the neighbouring compartments and in the adjacent carriages which was thus reached: consequently several minutes still elapsed before the train could be stopped;—and then there was a general rush of officials and passengers towards our compartment. The truth was soon made known: there fortunately happened to be a medical gentleman amongst the passengers; and he at once gave his attention to the nobleman.

My veil was now raised: I found myself recognised by several individuals, although they were not personally known to me: but when complimenting me on the presence of mind which I had displayed, they addressed me by the name of Miss. Trafford. The surgeon speedily pronounced that his lordship might be safely conveyed on to Rugby; and he urged that the train should be set in motion againd wit the least

possible delay. The livery servant who was one of the first to rush to our compartment, exhibited the utmost anxiety on behalf of his noble master; and I overheard one of the passengers inquire who his lordship was? I then learnt from the answer given by the domestic, that he was the Earl of Carshalton—Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe's father.

The train pursued its way,—the surgeon continuing to maintain his lordships in precisely the same posture as I had previously done. Water, which had been procured, was poured upon the patient's head; and he exhibited signs of revival, though still remaining unconscious of all that was passing around him. The domestic had begged permission to enter the compartment so as to be in close attendance upon his master; and I had of course readily given my assent.

I had now leisure to explain more fully to the medical gentleman and to his lordship's domestic all that had occurred, and what I had done to afford temporary assistance.

"I do not hesitate to declare," exclaimed the surgeon emphatically, "that to you, Miss. Trafford, will his lordship be indebted for his life if he should recover—as I trust and hope he will. At all events that he should be alive *now* is entirely owing to your prompt and skillful succour. Had you displayed less presence of mind—or had you been ignorant of the requisite treatment to adopt—the Earl must have perished."

"I may venture to assure Miss. Trafford," said the servant, who was a very civil, well-behaved, and intelligent man, "of the lasting gratitude of the noble family whose chief is now indebted to her for his life. His lordship has been on a visit to his country-seat near Embledon; and I could not help noticing yesterday—but still more especially this morning—that his complexion was more florid than usual. The colour itself was different;—and instead of being confined to the cheeks, it was a flush all over the face. I thought it peculiar: but I certainly had no misgivings of any serious nature."

The surgeon now intimated that on arriving at Rugby it would be necessary to convey his lordship to a hotel, where he must be taken the utmost care of until some of the members of his family could be fetched from London. The servant expressed a hope that the medical gentleman would be enabled to remain at Rugby with the Earl—a proposition which was agreed to.

"And you yourself," I said to the domestic, "may likewise remain in all confidence with your noble master: for I promise you that the very instant London is reached, I will proceed forthwith to Carshalton House and break to her ladyship the Countess what has occurred."

The servant expressed his warmest gratitude for this offer on my part—which was all the more welcome to the man inasmuch as it enabled him to remain with his master instead of entrusting his lordship to the care of strangers. He informed me that the Countess of Carshalton was in an indifferent state of health—that she was weak and nervous—and that I must therefore be guarded in the manner in which I broke the intelligence to her ladyship. To this instruction I promised to attend; and in a few moments afterwards

the train drew up at the Rugby Station.

The Earl or Carshalton, still unconscious of his position, was carefully removed from the compartment; and when the train resumed its way, I had leisure to reflect upon everything that had occurred. Singular to me appeared the coincidence that I should have become instrumental in saving the life of that very nobleman for the forging of whose name my unfortunate father had been sentenced to transportation! Yet, be it remembered that the Earl was in no way to blame in that transactions; he had originally proved a kind and generous friend to my father—it was his lordship who had given my sire his incumbency—and it was the money-lender who had discounted the forged bill, *not* the nobleman whose name was forged, that had so inexorably prosecuted my parent. The reader is already aware that the Earl of Carshalton was the father of Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe—that young nobleman whose wickedness had blighted the hopes and happiness of my friend Juliet.

When the train reached London I informed the guard and several of the passengers who addressed me on the subject, that I had undertaken to convey the intelligence of the Earl's illness to the Countess of Carshalton; and all possible despatch was therefore used to get me a cab. When proceeding with Beda towards Carshalton House at the West End of the town, I could not help hoping within my own mind that I should not there encounter Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe; for I felt that the very sight of the treacherous young noble man would prove most hateful to me. My apprehension on this head was not fulfilled: Lord Frederick was out at the time when I arrieved at the noble mansion; and I was soon conducted into the presence of the Countess. I found her ladyship alone: she was a thin sickly-looking woman, about fifty years of age—proud, reserved, and distant. I had sent up the name of Miss: Trafford, together with the announcement that I sought an interview with her ladyship on most particular business, which did not however regard myself; so that I at once obtained an audience. She was at first coldly polite; yet the distance of her manner did not prevent me from acquitting myself of my self-imposed task with all suitable delicacy. The intelligence was thus gradually broken; and then I was over--whelmed with a thousand questions, which her ladyship put with a nervous vehemence. I was fortunately enabled to assure her that the medical man whom I had left in attendance upon the Earl had given every hope of a favourable issue · and as I was compelled to detail all the circumstances of the affair, her ladyship learnt how I had rendered a certain degree of succour. She was now all gratitude and affability towars me; and as I had taken the precaution, before I left the railway-station, of desiring that a special train should be got in readiness, the Countess was enabled to depart with the least possible delay.

I now proceeded to the Marquis of Campanella's mansion, which was at no great distance. I had been exactly a week absent; and I found letters from Mrs. Norman, from Mrs. Oldcastle, from Juliet, and from Mary Glentworth. Fortunately none of these had required any immediate answer; and thus

the delay in replaying to them would not appear singular. I was most kindly received by the Marquis, the Marchioness, and Beatrice—who all expressed their hope that I would now remain with them for as long a time as possible. This invitation I accepted, because as the reader will recollect, I had left River House on the pretext of having change of air in the metropolis, and I thought that I must remain away at least another week before I could with propriety return to Mrs. Oldcastle's abode. Besides, considering my recent severe illness, I was anxious to recruit my strength as much as possible: for notwithstanding I had suffered so little from the effects of travelling, I experienced the necessity of repose and quietude.

On the following day I answered the various kind letters which I had received from Ramsgate and from River House; and I sent to the Earl of Carshalton's mansion to inquire whether any intelligence had been obtained in respect to his lordship. The answer was completely favourable: information had been received that morning, and all danger was entirely past.

Three or four days elapsed; and one afternoon I was seated by myself in the drawing-room of the Marquis of Campanella's mansion, when a small packet was brought in to me by one of the domestics. It was a little brown paper parcel, which had arrived by some conveyance—an afternoon-coach most probably—from River House; and I was seized with both alarm and wonder that such means of transmitting a letter to me should have been adopted in anticipation of the ordinary course of the post. I tore open the packet; it contained a note from Mrs. Oldcastle—and the contents of that note were brief but painful indeed. Juliet's child had expired in the morning, after being seized with convulsions; and the poor mother was distracted. Such an effect did the letter produce upon me that I fainted upon the sofa. When I came back to consciousness I found poor Beda weeping on her knees beside me—while the Marchioness of Campanella, who had just returned from paying some visits, was assisting the faithful and attached girl to afford me the necessary ministrations. The tears flowed from my eyes as I thought of the death of that poor little innocent whom a month back I had fondled in my arms—and as I thought likewise of poor Juliet's distracted state of mind; for notwithstanding the circumstances attending the birth or the babe, its young mother had doted on it with the fondest adoration.

The Marchoiness gently inquired whether anything had occured to distress me—whether I had received some sudden fright—or whether I had been abruptly attacked with indisposition? I thus at once perceived that she remained in ignorance of the cause of my swoon as well as of my present distress; and I glanced rapidly upon the sofa and the floor to see whether the letter and the envelope were still where I must have dropped them. But no! they met not my eyes; and Beda at once exclaimed. "It must have been sudden indisposition—I am sure it was: for I fortunately entered the room just as you had fainted, miss—and before her ladyship arrived."

I was struck by Beda's words

and manner; it seemed as if she were prompting me to the mode of affording an explanation to the Marchioness and giving me to understand that I need not say anything about the letter. It therefore naturally occured to me that Beda herself had read it, and that consequently Juliet's secret was now known to her. Concealing my annoyance as well as able, I turned to the Marchoiness, thanking her for her kindness, and assuring her that the indisposition which had temporarily over-powered me was now past. I then retired to my own chamber, followed by Beda.

The instant we were alone together, Beda produced the envelope and the letter—saying, "I thought, miss, the moment I beheld these upon the carpet, that the note had conveyed some evil tidings. I knew not whether you would wish them to be communicated to your friends; and I therefore took a precaution which left you free to make any statement you may think fit."

"And you did not read this note, Beda?" I said, fixing my eyes penetratingly upon the young girl's countenance.

"No miss.! I am incapable of such a thing!" she exclaimed, a slight flush of indignation appearing on her countenance; and that it was the honest indignation of innocence which felt itself to be suspected, I was in a moment convinced.

"Beda," I said, embracing the young girl, 'for an instant I wronged you! Deeply, deeply do I regret that I should have done so!"

"Ah, dear miss," responded Beda, pressing my hand fervently, while the tears stood in her luminous eyes, "you do not yet understand my character. Towards *you* I am incapable of the slightest act of perfidy: I should thoroughly and utterly despire myself if I were guilty of any meanness in regard to one to whom I am under such deed obligations. But oh! it is very different when dealing with your enemies. *Then* there is no dissimulation which I would not practise—no hypocrisy for which I should not be competent! But the Beda who would be thus acting is a very different Beda from the one that you have about your person! In time you will know me better."

"I know you thoroughly now, my dear girl!" I exclaimed, again caressing her affectionately: "this last act of yours had developed a trait of your character which proves your integrity and your high principle, as former deeds have shown your love and devotedness. The letter does indeed contain a piece of intelligence which I do not chose to impart to my friends beneath this roof: it is the death of one in whom I am interested——But ah! start not, Beda! it is not he whom you saw at Paisely——heaven forbid! And now leave me, my dear girl: I would be alone."

I resolved to return to River House on the morrow, in order to do my best to console my poor friend Juliet: but as I felt convinced that the next morning's post would bring me a letter with further details, I determind to say nothing in the mean time of my intention to depart from London for fear lest should thought by my friends at the mansion that I had indeed received afflicting intelligence which had caused my swoon; and in this case they

would consider it strange that I excluded them from my confidence. As I had foreseen, the next day's post brought me a letter from Mrs. Oldcastle, begging me to come to Juliet if I had not already set off on my return to River House. With this letter in my hand, at the breakfast-table, I was enabled to say that my friend Mrs. Oldcastle was most impatient for me to return to her, and that I must therefore depart without any further delay. The Marquis, the Marchioness, and Beatrice were very much concerned when they understood that I thus purposed to quit them: but they fully believed that Mrs. Oldcastle had such special claims upon my attention as I represented; and they therefore resigned themselves to part from me, exacting the promise that I would on a future occasion pass a longer period with them. They were deeply grateful for the services which at the time I had been enabled to render Beatrice; and they lost no occasion of testifying their friendship for me. I should observe that I saw Lady Cecilia Urban during this short stay of mine at the Marquis of Campanella's; and she treated me in the kindest and most affable manner. I should also mention that I had called upon Zarah: but she was temporarily absent from her lodgings. Of St. Clair and Lady Lilla Essendine I neither saw nor heard anything: but on one occasion I caught a glimpse of Mr. and Mrs. Parks, in there elegant phæton, dashing along the street in which the mansion of the Marquis was situated.

I had resolved to proceed as far as Ramsgate by the steam-packet in order that I might see my faithful Beda safe to her destination with the Normans again; and this time I had not so much trouble in reconciling her to a temporary separation, inasmuch as she saw that I loved her, and she was proud of having been taken into my confidence with regard to my journey to Paisely. It was at about four o'clock in the afternoon that the steam-packet reached Ramsgate, and I found that Mr. and Mrs. Norman were much distressed on account of the death of Juliet's child,—not that they themselves could have entertained much affection for a little being that they had never seen, and whose departure from this world might for its own sake, under the circumstances, be almost regarded as a happy release—but because they had seen from the distracted letter which Juliet herself had penned to them how profoundly she felt her bereavement.

And here I cannot help noticing how strong is the principle of parental affection which is interwoven the soul of woman. A man seems to care only for the child that is naturally born unto him, and whose birth is sanctified by the rites of marriage: but even then he scarcely develops any affection for the infant in its earliest days or weeks. and only when by its thousand little innocent and winning ways the child begins to render itself interesting. On the other hand, though the infant be born in shame. the mother loves it from its very birth—and perhaps all the more too from the fact that no father's arms are extended to receive the little stranger. I had seen that Melissa Harrison doted upon her own child, which was the offspring and the living evidence of her dishonour. I had

now seen the same with my friend Juliet Norman. These and other similar cases have led me to the belief that parental affection is an innate idea with the female sex—whereas with the opposite one it is not in born, but merely acquired.

It was late in the evening when I reached River House, where I was welcomed by Mrs. Oldcastle and Mary Glentworth—and not the less so by poor Juliet, who, afflicted though she were, had every testimonial of love and friendship to lavish upon me. I found that she did indeed experience the utmost distress for the loss of her child—though when we were alone together, she said to me, "And yet, dearest Ellen, it is all for the best! for if my babe had lived, I should in a short time have been compelled to part from it and consign the sweet innocent to the care of strangers."

As the child was not baptised, there was no necessity for formal obsequies; and when the little ceremony of interment, such as it was, had been completed, Juliet's mind appeared to become more easy. Resignation was taking the place of the first paroxysm of distress; and as she thus acquired fortitude, she became proportionately the more convinced that it was indeed all for the best. Mary Glentworth—who still knew her only as Mrs. Hall—had been most kind and attentive to her in her affliction; so that this amiable young lady was now as much beloved by Julliet as he was myself.

A fortnight elapsed—at the expiration of which it became necessary for me and Julliet to think of rejoining Mr. and Mrs. Norman; for their stay at Ramsgate was drawing to a conclusion, I had a conversation with Mrs. Oldcastle relative to Mary Glentworth; and the worthy lady assured me that she should feel happy in continuing to afford a home to the young friend in whom I was so deeply interested. In another conversation, which I had with Mary herself, she said that for the present she should render Mrs. Oldcastle's kindness available until a becoming period of mourning for her deceased mother her elapsed; but that then she should seriously think of the adoption of other plans. I assured her there was plenty of time to take such matters into consideration; and it was agreed between us that we should correspond frequently until we again met.

When the day separation came, Julliet sought an opportunity of expressing to her great-aunt Mrs. Oldcastle the full sense of gratitude which she experienced for all that lady's considerate and delicate kindness towards her; and Mrs. Oldcastle replied. "If I had not considered you worthy of my best care and tenderest attention—in short, if I had not been convinced that you were entirely sinned against and in no way sinning—I should not have treated you thus. Your secret, my dear girl is now safe: you may go back into the great world with as much confidence and assurance as all the circumstances which have happened can possibly leave behind. I am convinced that your principles are good; and as I have long been disabused of the strong prejudices I once entertained in respect to the stage, you may resume your profession if such be your taste. I could at once render you independent thereof if I thought fit: but I prefer for the present to leave you to your own exertions— though

remember at all times you may fly to me in any emergency, with the conviction that so long as you yourself are faultless you will be received with open arms."

To me also Mrs. Oldcastle said many kind things; and on both of us did she bestow several presents—not very costly ones certainly—but still as welcome to us in the form of friendly testimonials as if they had been of ten times the value. We affectionately embraced the old lady and Mary Glentworth; and we took our departure for Ramsgate. Juliet, being possessed of a vigorous constitution and robust health, had now completely recovered all her good looks: indeed methought she seemed handsomer than ever. There was a slight shade of pensiveness on her countenance: but this only rendered her the more interesting; and she exerted all her power to resume her former gaiety for the sake of her parents and myself, and likewise to avert suspicion when coming in contact with the world again. Mr. and Mrs. Norman, who had seen her for some months, were rejoiced to fold her in their arms again; and this delight was enhanced when they saw how well she was looking and with what fortitude she bore the bereavement which had at first plunged her into such deep affliction. Beda was happy enough on welcoming me again; and she told me that she had received a letter from William Lardner, who had succeeded in obtaining a berth on board an East Indiaman. She offered to show me the letter: but I would not accept the proposition. I told her that I had confidence in her discretion and prudence; and that if I had given her permission to correspond with the young man, it was because I entertained that opinion concerning her. Here was another source of pride and satisfaction for Beda,—who in one sense was as artless as a child, though in other respects she had all the astuteness and readiness of wit which could have belonged to an experienced woman.

After three or four days' sojourn at Ramsgate—where the fresh breezes tended still more than the gentler air at River House to renovate the bloom upon Juliet's cheeks—we all returned to London, and were once again installed in Hunter Street.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EARL OF CARSHALTON.

Amongst the numerous cards which had been left by visitors in our absence, and which we found upon the drawing-room table when we returned home, were two which the domestic intimated had been specially left for myself. These bore the names of the Earl and Countess of Carshalton. Mr. and Mrs. Norman and Juliet were all three excited and surprised at thus discovering that Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe's parents had called upon me: but Mr. Norman speedily remarked. "It is merely one of those instances of homage which from high quarters are paid to our dear Ellen's talents."

This solution of the circumstance satisfied Mrs. Norman and Juliet; and I did not choose to give any explanation on the subject: for if I had informed them of the adventure in the

railway-train, I must have mentioned my journey to Paisely—or at least have stated that I had visited Birmingham. It was through a pure feeling of modesty, and from a dislike to converse on topics personally interesting to myself alone, that I had hitherto said nothing in respect to my engagement to my cousin Harry Wakefield, and that I now kept silent relative to our recent meeting.

I conceived it to be my duty to pay my respects to the Earl and Countess of Carshalton: and I had no disinclination to take this step inasmuch as I saw by the fashionable intelligence in the newspaper that Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe was at the time in Paris. Accordingly, on the day after our return to town, I proceeded to Carshalton House, and was at once introduced to the drawing-room—where I found the Earl and Countess. His lordship was now completely restored to health; and the moment I entered the room he hastened forward, grasping both my hands with an effusion of the liveliest gratitude. The Countess welcomed me with an equal cordiality: they made me sit between them upon the sofa; and whatsoever aristocratic pride—which was not a little—marked their conduct at other times, was now altogether banished.

"Miss. Trafford," said the Earl, "to you I am indebted for my life. The surgeon and my own domestic have made me acquainted with the immensity of the obligation I owe you, for more explicitly than your own natural modesty would suffer you to explain it when you were good enough to call upon the Countess with the intelligence of my illness. I know not how I can testify my gratitude. Mere words are nothing. But if there be any service I can render—if there be any friend in whom you are interested—I will exert myself to the utmost in any task you may enjoin me. My position gives me considerable influence with the Government."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Countess; "I see Miss. Trafford's countenance brightening up! Yes—it is evident we can do something for her!—and I shall be so rejoiced. For do you know, my dear Miss. Trafford, his lordship and I have been wondering how we could testify our gratitude; and it would so delight us to be enabled to give you a proof of it—though bear in mind that we shall all the same continue your debtors."

Yes, my countenance had indeed brightened up from its wonted air of calmness; for an idea had flashed into my mind, and a wild hope had thrillingly taken possession of my heart.

"My lord," I said, "there is indeed a favour which I could ask of you, if be not too great—a favour which would leave me immeasurably your debtor ——"

"Name it, Miss. Trafford!" both the Countess and himself ejaculated as if in the same breath.

"I scarcely know how to frame my request," I responded, now hesitating and suddenly seized with confusion. "But oh, my lord!—and you, too, my lady—listen to a secret which I have to reveal to you! My real name is not Trafford——"

"We have heard it whispered," said the Countess—"I know not exactly where—that it is merely a pseudonym according to a fashion by no means unusual in

the dramatic world—but that your real name is Percy."

"It is," I rejoined: and I felt the blood rushing to my cheeks as I went on to say, "And does not the name of *Percy*, my lord, remain you of someone whom in earlier years you knew and be-friended?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Earl. "What! Percy the clergyman?"

"The same, my lord," I answeed, with the blushes deepening on my cheeks: and oh! that I should have felt that blush glowing and burning there on account of the author of my being!

"But what do you mean?" inquired the Earl kindly. "It is possible that any connection subsists between yourself and that unfortunate man whom you have named?"

"Speak, my dear girl," whispered the Countess. "Do not be afraid. We are your friends."

"That unfortunate man," I said, with a convulsive sob, "is my own father!"

"Your farther!" ejaculated the Earl: and then both he and the Countess surveyed me with illumitable compassion.

"Yes—he is my father," I continued: "and he lives—you know that he is alive, my lord!—you yourself saw him not very long ago in London!"

"It is true," rejoined the Earl of Carshalton; "and I do not bear the unfortunate man any ill-will. On the contrary, Miss Percy, now that I know he is so nearly connected with yourself, if there be anything I can possibly do——"

"My lord," I said entreatingly, "you can procure his pardon—you possess influence with the Government—you may become the means of restoring him in safety to his own native country, if not to society itself!"

"Anything that lies in my power would I do to serve you, Miss. Percy," said the Earl: "but there is one circumstance——"

"Alas, I know what you mean, my lord! My unhappy father fled from the far-off penal colony—"

"It is this that constitutes the only difficulty," remarked Lord Carshalton, in a musing manner. "If the whole affair were to remain private—and if your father would content himself with having his free pardon granted but that it should not be paraded in the newspapers, it would be altogether different. I, however, presume his object would be to give publicity to the fact; and this would call down upon the Government such animadversion on the part of the Liberal press that I fear the Secretary of State would hardly venture to run such a risk by granting such a boon."

If I had not interrupted this speech almost at the very outset, it was because hope was again so vividly excited within me that my emotions choked the power of utterance. At length I said, in a tone of fervid and grateful enthusiasm, "Oh, my lord! there is no difficulty! Secrecy is above all things to be desired: whereas, on the other hand, the publicity of the act would almost disincline me to behold it accomplished at all. If it be possible to procure this pardon for my unfortunate father, it would at least enable him to return in safety to England—without the fear——"

"Enough, Miss. Percy!" said the Earl of Carshalton: "consider this as good as done. In

a few days you shall receive your father's pardon. The Countess and myself will respect your secret; and never from our lips shall it go forth to the world—no, not even to our own children."

I expressed my warmest thanks for the promise held out and the assurances thus given to me: and when I had recovered from the almost overpowering effect of the joyous emotions which were agitating in my soul, I rose to take my departure. But the Earl and Countess insisted on keeping me with them a little longer: luncheon was served up—and we discoursed on a variety of subjects.

"By the bye," said the Earl of Carshalton, after a brief pause in the conversation, "I could not help noticing that sweetly-interesting attendant of yours who travelled with you on the occasion when you rendered me the important service for which I am so deeply grateful. I could not help looking at that young girl—I hope that neither you nor she thought me rude: but there was a certain reason—"

"The truth is, my dear Miss. Percy," said the Countess, "his lordship has before told me how interested he was in that beautiful little maid of yours. It struck him that she was of gipsy origin—or at least that there was Zingari blood in her veins; and *we*," she added in a graver tone, "have the best possible reason to believe that if amongst the gipsies there are bad qualities, so on the other hand there are good ones."

"Yes," I answered; "his lordship was right:—that interesting dependant of mine is of gipsy origin."

"I will tell you, Miss. Percy," continued the countess, "why both his lordship and myself are always interested when we behold a gipsy—and we make it a rule never to suffer one to pass us without affording some proof of this interest, which indeed takes the form of gratitude. Our son, Lord Frederick, when a child, was stolen from his nurse—we were staying then at our country seat near Embledon—"

"Ah!" I ejaculated, as an idea flashed to my mind: "this is indeed most singular! Methinks I can continue the narrative which your ladyship has commenced. The stolen child was restored to you and you generously allowed an annuity to the gipsies who afforded you this happiness."

"True, Miss. Percy!" cried the Countess. "But how came you acquainted with an incident of which his lordship and myself have so rarely spoken except within the circle of our own family?"

"I learnt that tale from the lips of the little maiden whose appearance so much interested your lordship: for she," I continued, "is the daughter of those persons who restored your child and to whom you allowed an annuity."

"This is indeed most remarkable!" exclaimed the Earl of Carshalton. "The name of that man who restored us our child was Robinson."

"And my youthful dependant's name is Beda Robinson," I answered. "Aided by the anninty which your lordship allowed, her parents were enabled to live in what may be termed a respectable manner for gipsy-people. From all that I have heard relative to them, they were honest and upright——"

"But if I had known where to find their daughter," exclaimed the Earl, "I would have continued that same anninty to her. It was

but twenty pounds a year. It used to be paid in half-yearly portions—my steward at Embledon Park was entrusted with this duty—and I think it was about six or seven years ago that Robinson ceased to call for his stipend."

"It was at about that time he and his wife died," I responded. "They were cut off suddenly, by some malignant fever, within two or three days of one another; and Beda was removed to another place the instant the malady developed itself, for fear that she should catch it. I have heard all these particulars from Beda's own lips; and from the details which I have thus gathered, it is to be presumed that her father and mother must have been so suddenly prostrated by the deadly malady as to incapacitate them from making on their daughter's behalf a revelation which might have proved serviceable to her. All she knows is that her parents received an annuity from some rich personages: but she is in complete ignorance of the name of the Earl of Carshalton in connexion with that bounty."

"The obligation under which we lay to her parents was so great," rejoined the nobleman, "that we should cheerfully have continued the annuity to their daughter. Indeed, when I learnt that Robinson had suddenly ceased to call for his money, I instructed my steward to make all possible inquiries concerning him: but these were of no avail. I need not now ask whether the daughter of those gipsies is a deserving girl: it is sufficient that she is in your service, Miss. Percy, to convince me of her merit. I am now prepared to do for her watever you may recommend. Shall I continue the annuity?"

"She requires it not my lord," I answered; "she is well provided for in my service. Indeed she is so faithful and affectionate, that I have every reason to treat her as a friend rather than as a menial; and I shall never lose sight of her."

The Earl reflected for a few moments; and he then said, "Leave this matter to me, Miss. Percy. I shall not forget your young friend Beda."

I now took my leave of Lord and Lady Carshalton, infinitely delighted with all that had taken place during our interview. I proceeded to Zarah's lodgings in the neighbourhood of the London University; and on this occasion I found her at home. I had not seen her for nearly two months: it was at the close of June when I had left London for the vacation—it was now verging towards the end of August. Exactly six months had elapsed since Zarah had separated herself from her old grandmother Dame Betty, and had assumed the position of a lady. At the time when I left London for River House she had already made a trully marvellous progress in her various studies; and I was now prepared to learn that during those additional two months she had progressed in a proportionate degree. She was delighted to see me: she welcomed me with all the enthusiasm of the most grateful friendship; and she expressed her regret that she should have been temporarily absent from her dwelling when I called upon her about three weeks previously, at the time I was staying with the Cambanellas.

"I merely went away for a few days," she observed, "on a visit to a watering-place; for I had studied so hard that though of a

vigorous constitution and enjoying the most robust health, I nevertheless experienced the necessity of change of air."

"Have you seen your grandmother recently?" I inquired.

"I have not seen her for several months," she responded: "but I have every reason to believe that she is perfectly quiet at her little cottage between Birmingham and Embledon."

"And what reason have you for this supposition, Zarah?" I asked.

"Because I charged the young woman who is in attendance upon her, to send me an account of all my grandmothsr's proceedings," replied Zarah. "But you, my dear Miss. Percy, have some motive for putting this question?"

"Yes—I have a motive," I rejoined: "for either that young woman of whom you speak proves faithless to the instructions which you have given her; or else your grandmother conducts her proceedings with so much stealthy caution as to set all espial at defiance."

"What mean you?" asked Zarah, almost frightened at the words which had just fallen from my lips. "Has that wretched old woman been attempting aught against your peace and security? of so—" and a dark cloud lowered upon the duskily handsome countenance of Zarah.

Without any further preface I proceeded to relate everything that had occurred at Birmingham—how Beda had fallen in with the old dame—how she had been taken to the cottage—and how she had received her instructions in respect to the poisoned lozenges. Zarah listened in deepest silence, but with looks that indicated all the disgust, horror, shame, and indignation which she experienced at the vile machinations of her old grandmother against me.

"Beda is as inelligent as she is trustworthy," said Zarah, in a musing strain when I had ceased speaking. "The answers she gave to my wicked, infatuated grandmother, when questioned as to the circumstances of her entrance into your service, were most shrewd and politic. Oh, that my grandmother should still continue to lend herself to the abominable schemes of your enemies!—for there can be no doubt in respect to the truth of your conjecture that Edwin St. Ciair"—here Zarah's voice tembled perceptibly—" and Lady Lilla Essendine were the prime movers in this new scheme of iniquity."

There was a brief pause—at the expiration of which I said, 'It was for your sake, Zarah, that I yielded Beda's representations, and for bore from invoking the aid of the law against those wretches.'

"Oh, you are indeed justified in using harsh words!" she ejaculated, while an expression of bitter anguish swept over her countenance. "I thank you, my dear Miss. Percy—a thousand times do I hank you for once again consenting to avoid an exposure which would prove so fatal to those principally concerned, and which would redound upon others! And ah! if such exposure had taken place, all that I for the last six months have been doing, would be utterly thrown away!"

"I do not understand you, Zarah," I observed astonished at the remark that had just fallen from her lips.

"I will presently explain myself," she responded. "But no!" she abruptly ejaculated:

"I will afford you an opportunity of comprehending my meaning, Yes—the time is now come when I must take the step that is to decide my own fate!—that step for which during six long months I have been so assiduously and earnestly preparing myself! And if I be successful—as I hope and trust that I may—Oh! then. in that case, rest assured, my dear Miss. Percy, that I shall henceforth exist as a barrier between yourself and any danger on the part of Edwin St. Clair."

There was another pause, during which Zarah seemed absorbed in her reflections; while I myself mediated in wonder and curiosity upon the strange mysterious words that had been flowing from her lips.

"You did well to order those poisoned lozenges to be destroyed," she said, evidently giving sudden expression to a thought which had just recurred to her mind, "Unfortunately, my dear friend," she continued, "my grandmother possesses a marvellous skill in the compounding of various drugs; for she has been in Italy and in Egypt—and in those countries she learnt the diabolic art. She has at times spoken to me of many of her secrets; and I am thus at no loss to conjecture what must have been the slow poison which she used in the lozenges that she gave to Beda for the purpose of undermining your constitution and carrying you to a premature grave. That poison in antimony. By administering infinitesimal yet continuous doses, the vital powers are gradually sapped—all the faculties of life itself are impaired—and thus by degrees the victim sinks out of existence. While such a process is going on, the most skilful medical attendant would be baffled—he could not possibly suspect the presence of this poison, so insidious in its operation and yet so sure in its effects! But enough of the fearful subject! I shudder to think of it—and I feel ashamed to converse upon it, because it is a kinswoman of mine, who wields that fatal and mysteriously striking weapon!"

"Yes—let us turn the discourse, Zarah," I said: for I saw that it gave her infinite pain. "And now tell me about your studies. How do they progress? and is there any service which I can render you?"

"Ah! it is on this topic that I am now desirous to talk with you," exclaimed Zarah, her countenance brightening up. "Have you an hour to spare?"

"Two, if you please, at your service," I replied.

"Then you shall subject me to a species of examination!" she ejaculated, "for I can assure you it is of importance."

Zarah then handed me a list of the various works which she had read in the departments of history, science, and general literature, and without any pedantic display, but even with a certain degree of bashfulness—though with a most intelligent clearness—she proceeded to afford me proofs that she had studied those works to considerable effect. She next sat down to the piano, and gave me several specimens of the progress she had made in the study of music. When this part of the examination was finished, she produced her portfolio and exhibited her drawings. I was perfectly astonished at the skill which these specimens displayed, considering that six months back she was utterly ignorant of the art itself. Then she

showed me some themes and other prose-compositions which she had achieved: and I read them with great interest and with increasing wonderment. Her handwriting was fluent and lady-like—the language was perfectly grammatical—in most instances it was well chosen: the only fault which hypercriticism could find with it, was that in some parts it was a trifle too florid and high flown. This defeat—if a positive defeat it were—I delicately pointed out to Zarah: she at once comprehended my meaning—she saw the justice of my strictures; and under my supervision she proceeded to prune down all explotives and mitigate the flourishing redundancy of the passages complained of. In short, I was perfectly surprised at the progress which Zarah had made in every branch of her self-imposed studies; and I could scarcely believe that I beheld before me the same person who about ten months back had flung into the post-chaise, as I was returning from Embledon, that illspelt letter penned in a bold round masculine hand.

"You must have laboured very hard, Zarah," I observed, "to have accomplished so much in the comparatively-brief space of six months; for it is only half a year since you settled yourself in these lodgings to undertake your self-imposed tasks. But now tell me what is the meaning of all this mystery. It is evidently connected with the step which, as you say, you are about to take—an important step too!"

"In three days hence, my dear friend," she responded, "you shall behold the solution of this mystery. Have patience for that period. It is my intention to remove to-morrow to other lodgings: I have not as yet quite decided where they are to be; but you shall shortly receive a note from me, indicating my new abode, and making an appointment for you to visit me there."

"Which appointment, Zarah, I shall assuredly keep," was my response: and I then took leave of her, wondering what could be the mystery of her conduct for the last six months, and deeply curious for the solution thereof.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE SCENE.

JULIET NORMAN was now about to return to the stage Perhaps if her own inclinations had been consulted to a nicety, she would rather have remained in seclusion for a little while longer, until the full sense of her recent bereavement had worn off: but a variety of considerations induced her to seek an engagement at the hands of Mr. Richards with the least possible delay. In the first place she was anxious to avert all suspicion in respect to her retirement of a few months from the metropolis: and this she thought she could best do by resuming her professional avocation immediately after her return from her aunt's house. In the second place her parents regularly spent the full amount of their salaries; and therefore whatsoever Juliet might be enabled to earn became a useful addition to their means: for, as I have already stated, from my purse they would accept nothing more than the amount which they considered to be a fair and commensurate remuneration for the cost of my residence

beneath their roof. In the third place Juliet had her own proper pride; and she naturally sought to prove to Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe that she was not thoroughly heart-broken nor crushed by the infamous treatment she had experienced at his hands. And finally, Juliet was attached to that profession in which she had already won no inconsiderable share of renown, and in which she was certain of being able to obtain a leading position.

Mr. Richards was delighted when he received an intimation that Miss. Norman was ready to negotiate for an engagement; and he proposed terms so liberal that a bargain was very shortly concluded. Melissa Harrison, who had hitherto been the star of the ballet during the temporary secession of Juliet Norman, was by no means jealous when she found that our mutual friend was to resume her former place as the leading genius in that sphere. Juliet's reappearance upon the stage was welcome also to the public, who had ever regarded her as a special favourite; for her handsome countenance, her fine person, the lady-like grace which characterized her, the refinement and the elegance which she introduced into her practice of the Terpsichorean art—all combined thus to secure the applause of the beholders.

I have a vivid recollection of that evening of Juliet's reappearance. I had performed the part of Lady Macbeth, and had achieved one of my most glorious triumphs. I was elated and in high spirits; for there was also in my mind the joyous recollection of the Earl of Carshalton's promise to procure the pardon of my father. I was changing my attire, at the conclusion of Shakspere's tragedy, when Juliet entered my dressing-room ready apparelled for the ballet; and methought she had never looked so handsome. *She* likewise seemed to anticipate a triumph; for there was a radiance in her large deep blue eyes which shed its beams over that countenance which possessed so fine an aquiline profile. She seemed to have a nobler carriage than ever of the long arching neck; and her form had recently taken a richer development than it was even wont to have—Hebe-like as her shape always was. Yet the waist preserved its wasp-like thinness; and notwithstanding a luxuriance of contours in some respects, her tall figure displayed all that sylphid lightness which was fitted for the dance. Her dark hair was arranged in massive bands, and gathered in a Grecian knot at the back of the well shaped head. Her rich full lips, parting with the smile of anticipated triumph, revealed the superb teeth: and altogether it struck me that Juliet Norman had never appeared so strikingly handsome.

Shortly after her entrance into my dressing-room, Melissa Harrison came thither also; and she likewise appeared more than usually attractive. I have already said that she was a handsome young woman, with a very fine figure: she was wont to be somewhat sickly-looking—but for a considerable time past her health was greatly improved: indeed I may say it was completely restored; and she had a natural colour upon the cheeks which only rendered it necessary to shed thereon the slightest hue of an artificial rose. With two such

"stars" to lead the ballet, Mr. Richards had every reason to be proud as a manager, and to congratulate himself on the certainty of reaping a golden harvest. When Juliet appeared upon the stage, she was welcomed with a perfect *furore* of applause; and she certainly acquitted herself in a manner which transcended all her former efforts. The triumph she had expected to accomplish was thoroughly achieved; and after the curtain had fallen, she was loudly called for—and on being led fordward, was enthusiastically applauded.

The third day since my interview with Zarah arrived; and as yet I had not received from her the promised letter to announce the address of her new lodgings and to make an appointment for me to call upon her. I waited at home until past three o'clock in the afternoon, expecting the arrival of her communication by every post: but still it came not. I thought that she had perhaps written and that her letter might possibly have miscarried: I accordingly proceeded to her lodgings in the neighbourhood of the London University: but I there learnt that she had removed the day previously, and the landlady of the house knew not whither she had gone.

I returned to Hunter Street: the dinner-hour passed away—and still no letter arrived from Zarah. It was not one of my evenings for appearing at the theatre: and I therefore remained at home, in anxious expectation of receiving the promised note The normans set off at their usual hour for their professional engagements; and it was about eight o'clock when I heard a cab stop opposite the house. One of the servants came up to inform me that a lady desired to speak to me at once; and that I might know who she was, she had desired the domestic to intimate that it was the person from whom I was expecting a letter. I instataneously conceived that as Zarah did not come up-stairs, she wished me to accompany her I therefore hastened to my chamber, put on my bonnet and shawl, and sped down to the cab.

"Can you come with me for an hour," she hastily asked: and I perceived that her voice was tremulous with some deep emotion.

"Yes," I answered, at once entering the vehicle.

"Back to the house where you took me up!" said Zarah to the driver; "and go quick! You shall be well paid!—My dear Miss. Percy," she continued, addressing herself to me as the cab rolled rapidly along, "you must have been surprised at not hearing from me according to promise?"

"Both surprised and uneasy," I answered: "for I have been to your former lodgings in search of you."

"And you received no tidings of me there," said Zarah. "No—for there is a certain mystery in all my proceedings; and I choose not to gratify the curiosity of landladies or domestics by affording them a clue to my movements in a new place after I have quitted an old one. In respect to the delay in writing to you, it has been occasioned by my inability to find a particular person until within the hour that is now passing; and this difficulty I had not foreseen when I gave you that promise. The person to whom am alluding, will be at my lodgings at half-past eight o'clock: we

shall have time to reach them before he arrives—or at least I hope so; and then, as in the case of myself and Luigi, you shall become an unseen witness of the interview which takes place between us."

"And who this person, Zarah?" I inquired, more than ever wondering at the mystery that she maintained, and marvelling to what object all these proceeding, could possibly tend.

"My dear Miss. Percy," she said, without exactly answering the question, "you are about to learn the principal secret of my life. That secret has placed me in a position which now compels me to regard the result of the expected interview as the decision of my fate. If it be for weal—according as I measure the standard of my own happiness—you may perhaps think fit to congratulate me; but if it be for woe, I confident that you will afford me your sympathy."

In those alternatives, my conduct either way will prove as you have anticipated. But tell me, Zarah," I said, "who is this person that you are about to meet and whom you have experienced such difficulty in finding?"

"You are courageous, Miss. Percy," she answered; "and I believe—I hope—you know me well enough to be confident that I would sooner sacrifice my life to render you a service than accept the most brilliant rewards to do you an injury. Yes, I will tell you who the person is that I am about to meet. It is not fair that you should be taken by surprise, or that you should even proceed any further without knowing in whose vicinage you will remain as an unseen witness. It is Captain St. Clair."

I could hardly repress an ejaculation of mingled astonishment and annoyance at this announcement: but the next moment it struck me that Zarah must have some very strong motives for rendering me the witness of an interview between herself an that individual. I had the fullest confidence in the fidelity of her attachment towards me; and therefore I resolved to proceed. Besides, it occurred to me that I should most assuredly learn fresh secrets relative to St. Clair, and that the more I knew of his private life the more completely he would be in my power, and the greater the number of offensive and defensive weapons I should be getting into my own hand. Finally, I was very curious to penetrate all these mysteries in which Zarah was playing so singular a part.

"You will come with me?" she said, after having allowed a few minutes to elapse for my meditation.

"Yes," I responded; "I will pursue this adventure to the end."

There was now another interval of silence—during which, as I contemplated Zarah by the blaze of light shed from the shops in the West End streets through which we were passing, I perceived that she was very handsomely dressed Indeed she was fashionably apparelled—but in a style strictly consistent with good taste, there being nothing gaudy nor outrageous in her toilet. She had evidently addressed herself to some first-rate milliner, to whose discretion and judgment she had completely abandoned herself in respect to her raiment. She looked exceedingly handsome; and he flush of excitement upon her cheeks glowed through the dusky

tint of her complexion. Her long black her flowed from beneath an elegant Parsian bonnet ; and her large eyes shone with a stronger lustre than was even their wont. I saw in the expression of her features that there was a firm decision to enact a particular part at the expected interview, and that she hoped likswise to work it out to a successful issue.

I was still wondering what purpose Zarah could possibly have in view, when the cab stopped in front of a house situated in a good street at the West End of the town. A cabriolet, with its lighted lamps, which had already stopped there, had to draw on a little to make way for our own humbler vehicle ; and Zarah hastily said, "St. Clair has arrived !"

"Then your project of rendering me an unseen listener," I said, "has failed ?"

"Not so," replied Zarah . "the arrangement continues as before."

We alighted : she rewarded the cabman with a liberality which elicited his warmest thanks ; and the front door was opened by a very neatly attired maid-servant. Zarah inquired if a gentleman were waiting in the front drawing-room ? and the maid replied in the affirmative. My gipsy-friend then led me up a handsome staircase to the first-floor, where she gently opened a door. I entered a room which was involved in semi-obscurity; but there was sufficient light from the windows to show me that it was a handsomely-furnished sitting apartment, having the air of a back drawing-room. Zarah closed the door upon me as noiselessly as she had opened it: and I speedily discovered that there was a large pair of folding-doors communicating with the front apartment. My gipsy-friend evidently did not intended to lose any time,nor expose me to the chance of discovery in my hiding-place, by ascending to her own chamber to make any change in her apparel; for she proceeded at once into the front drawing-room by means of a door communicating therewith from the landing.

"I am here according to promise, my dear Zarah," said St. Clair, in a listless indifferent manner as if were addressing himself to some menial towards whom he might adopt a tone of a certain insolent familiarity. "And now perhaps you will have the kindness to tell me what all this means—why for the last six or seven months you have disared as it were from the world—why I now find you pranked out in this elegant style—and why you are the tenant of handsome apartments;—*you* who at one time who at one time would have been contented with a ricketty old caravan or a tumble-down cottage."

"Have the kindness to be seated, Captain St. Clair," said Zarah, in a calm voice, which showed the most perfect confidence in herself, and which seemed to imply a quiet disdain to take any notice of the impertinent flippancy of his manner and observations.

At the same time that she thus spoke, she advanced towards the folding-doors to draw forward for her own use a chair which stood against them : and this action, which could have nothing significant in it for St. Clair, nevertheless had a certain purpose which at once developed itself to me ; for by the removal of the chair one of the leaves of the folding-doors opened to the extent of about an inch, thus enabling me

to listen with all the greater facility to whatsoever conversation might take place.

"You certainly look remarkably well, Zarah," continued St. Clair, "in that fashionable toilet of yours: but permit a friend to observe that such an apparel and such a mode of life as this which you seem to be leading are rather inconsistent with the want of those graces of manner—those mental accomplishments, which constitute true gentility.

"And do you find, Captain St Clair," asked Zarah, in a really most lady-like tone, "that I am so completely deficient in these respects?"

"On my soul, Zarah, I can't make you out?" ejaculated St. Clair. "You do not seem to be the same Zarah that I used to know. If I had been drinking I should think that my eyes were deceiving me: but being in possession of my sober senses, I confess that I am astonished. Yes—truly the more I look at you, the more do you seem altered. Why, what on earth does it all mean? That gesture of yours is far from inelegant—that posture becomes you—and as I am a living man! you seem as if you had never worn anything else but pink bonnets from Paris and silk dresses made up by the Court milliner. What the deuce *does* it all mean Zarah?"

"It means, Captain St. Clair," she answered, "that I have studied to work this improvement in myself. You remember that some six or seven months back you made me a present of a bank-note—"

"For five hundred pounds," "added St. Clair carelessly. "But what of that? I grant you that with a portion of it you might purchase the elegant toilet which you wear, and that it would for a long time enable you to live in such apartments as these. But you cannot by refinement of manner with gold; and though you may have a piano, for instance, stuck up in that recess, I will defy you to touch a note of it tunefully!"

Without answering a syllable, Zarah rose from her seat, proceeded to the piano, placed herself there, and commenced the most difficult piece of music of which she had rendered herself the mistress. At first I could not prevent myself from trembling—for much I feared lest she should be nervous and thus fail of achieving the success at which she aimed in this department of her studies. But my apprehension soon wore off, as I found that she progressed with the most perfect accuracy: her execution was characterized by taste and skill; and not a false note jarred upon the ear. I could even discern that to the very flow of harmony which she evoked from the instrument, she imparted as it were some of the enthusiasm that was in her own soul; and thus she gave greater effect to the charm of the music itself. I longed to peep forth to snatch a glimpse at St. Clair's countenance, so as to ascertain what he thought of this demonstration of Zarah's accomplishment. but I dared not risk aught that should tend to the discovery of my presence there. I may here observe that I always experienced a cold creeping horror, when finding myself in the neighbourhood of that man, or when brought in contact with him:—at least such had been my feeling ever since I had begun to suspect

that he had been guilty of crimes the bare idea of which was only too well calculated to send a shudder along all my nerves and a glacial chill sweeping though the very blood itself. But now, for the time being, this disagreeable sensation, was absorbed in the charm of Zarah's music, and in the glow of pleasure which I experienced at her success.

"Oh my soul!" exclaimed St. Clair, as the last sounds of the harmony died away vibratingly through the room, "you astonish me, Zarah!"—and yet methought there was a certain slight undercurrent of supercilious scorn and contempt in his accents. "But, after all, one may have a natural taste for music; and in that case a few guineas bestowed upon a skilful teacher will lead to such a result as that of which you have just given me a specimen Have you ever heard of such a thing as *cramming* young men to pass their examinations at the universities or public schools? There is such a system, I can assure you; and I now begin to think that it can as readily be applied to the art of music as to Latin, Greek, or mathematics."

"There are a number of music-books," responded Zarah, in that same quiet tone in which she had from the first been speaking: "and if it should suit your fancy to indicate any particular price——"

"I have really a very great mind to put you to the test, Zarah," interrupted St. Clair; "for this scene is infinitely amusing; and through I cannot for my life understand the aim of it, yet I am willing enough to prolong it, as I have nothing better to do for an hour or so."

St. Clair rose from his seat; and now I did venture to take a peep from my hiding-place. I saw that he had approached the pile of music-books which Zarah had indicated; and he had taken one up in his hand. He was elegantly dressed in evening custume. His countenance, usually pale. had the slightest flush upon the cheeks—either from the effect of wine (despite his previous disavowal of having been drinking) or else from the excitement of the present scene; but his forehead retained all that alabaster polish which seemed to render it the throne of a high order of intellect—through heavens! how at times perverted! He no longer wore a moustache; and its absencefully revealved that upper lip with its haughty expression. His light brown hair was arranged in rich clustering curls; and his costume set off the symmetry of his form to the fullest advantage. It was a pity to gaze upon such a perfect specimen of mosculine beauty, and be compelled to recoil in horror from the blackness of the heart which that fair mask concealed. It was as if a traveller through the fervid regions of Hindostan came within view of a temple of most exquisite architecture, all the details being in perfect harmony, and all the external beauty of the edifice calculated to convey the most agreeable impression to the mind, were it not for the knowledge that the temple did but enshrine an idol of the most repulsive form and revolting hideousness.

But let me return to the thread of my story. St. Clair, as I have said, took up one of the music-books; and having for a few movements turned over the leaves, he selected a piece, exclaiming, "Now Zarah, if there be anything more

than a mere parrot-like attainment in the display you have just made, you will try your hand at this. My own taste in music is not altogether slight; and therefore I warn you against making an exhibition that may evoke peals of laughter from my lips."

Zarah said nothing: but she resumed her seat at the piano: and at the very first notes I could easily perceive that she was completely self-possessed, full of confidence, and having all her presence of mind about her. Her success was therefore as great as in the former instance and when she had finished, St. Clair, throwing himself back again into his seat, said, "Well, my dear Zarah, this is uncommonly to your credit: but I am as much as ever at a loss to understand your object and purpose in seeking such an accomplishment.

"Every soul may have its ambition." was Zarah's calm response. "You aspire to shine in the senate; and it is fortunate for you that you were born a gentleman. By means of birth and education you found two-thirds of the difficulties already surmounted when you resolved to climb the ladder. With me it it is different. In the working out of my own ambition. I had to commence from the very beginning to overcome the disadvantages of obscure birth and an almost utterly-neglected education. Thus, in aspiring to make myslf a lady—"

"A lady?" echoed St. Clair: and nothing could exceed the scornfulness of the accents in which he spoke,—a scornfulness which was prolonged with the most withering effect in the laugh that rolled forth in a mocking harmony from his lips.

I thought that Zarah would now assuredly give vent to an outburst of fury and indignation: for after all the pains she had taken, and the arduous labours she had endured to improve her mind and her manners, the taunt implied by St. Clairs's conduct was most insufferably cruel. But I was mistaken. It was in the same placid patient tone as before that she said, "You may laugh, Captain St. Clair: but the very loftiness of your own ambition should render you more generous in viewing my far more puny and insignificant one."

"Do yon know, Zarah," he responded, "that this scene is most irresistably amusing? But if you mean me to take it seriously, be it so. In that case I must consider myself as the audience at a drama, and I must play the part of critic. In the exercise of these functions, therefore, suffer me to observe that though you exhibit a certain tastefulness of toilet, thanks to your milliner!—a certain proficiency in music, thanks to some skilful professor! —a certain genteel choice of language and a certain smoothness of manner, thanks to your quick intelligence which has rendered you imitatively expert!—yet all these things do not constitute *the lady*. We will put the matter of birth out of the question —because, as society is constituted, if a gentleman marries his cook-wench, he makes her a lady, at least in name. But to be a real lady, Zarah, in the proper acceptation of the term, you must have have more accomplishments than that of a mere jingling on the piano. You must write a genteel fluent hand: whereas, if my recollection serves me, yours produces the impression of having been written by a school-

boy with the point of a skewer;—and pardon me for adding, your orthography as well as your use of capitals is the most wondrous caligraphic mosaic work that ever I had the misfortune to behold."

"Doubtless this long *critique* of yours captain St. Clair," said Zarah, with a tone that struck me as if she were smiling with arch good humour, "would read even better than it sounds orally. Let us see. Have patience for a few moments—and I will commit it to paper."

"Take your time," observed St. Clair, again with a certain superciliousness in his accents "I am not the least hurried—and I repeat, the whole scene is infinitely diverting."

There was now an interval of silence for a few minutes; and as I again ventured to peep from my hiding-place, I saw that Zarah was writing—while St. Clair, lounging back in his seat, was contemplating her with the half-careless air of fashionable indolence.

"Now see how it reads', said Zarah: and she handed him the paper on which she had been writing

"Well, I must confess the penmanship defies all criticism," remarked St. Clair: "but let us look at the spelling. I vow and protest that I am more and more astonished! I really thought, Zarah, that you would have spelt *caligraphic* with two *l*'s, and introduced a capital at the beginning of every other word. But the specimen is perfect. However, let that pass: any schoolgirl decently educated can write a fair hand. But what say you to the real accomplishments that are required to make the veritable lady? There is drawing, for instance——"

"Have the kindness," responded Zarah, "to glance into that portfolio which lies upon the table."

"Ah!" ejaculated St. Clair; "if you have been making any attempts in this department, I can guess what they must be. There was in ancient times a painter of so miserable a talent that he was compelled to write 'This is a house,' or 'This is a tree,' beneath his pictures to enable a beholder to understand the subjects of them. I am afraid, Zarah——but ah! you don't mean to tell me that you drew this landscape in pencil or this head in crayons?"

My gipsy-friend did not immediately answer the questions; and as I again ventured to peep forth, I saw that she was bending over the writing materials which she had before her. Then she passed a sheet of paper across the table St. Clair, saying, "Do you recognise this little hastily-sketched portrait? It is a mere pen and ink outline——"

"Why it is myself!" he exclaimed. "But are you sure you have not flattered me to some little extent?—I really did not fancy that I was quite so good-looking as this profile represents me. However, I can no longer doubt that you are the parent of the drawings in this portfolio. Again I ask, Zarah, what on earth does it all mean? Will you have me understand that beneath the gloss of these superficial accomplishments you possess any more substantial attainments?"

"Just have the goodness to glance your eye over the books on those shelves," responded Zarah; "and you will see what for some

months past has been amongst the subjects of my studies."

St. Clair rose from his seat; and again venturing to peep forth, I beheld him approach an elegant book-case which was immediately behind the chair that he had just left. At that moment, as his back was turned towards us, Zarah—who caught a glimpse of my countenance—darted a rapid glance at me—a glance that was full of triumph, and which seemed to prognosticate the completest success in respect to the ulterior aim, whatever it were, which she had in view.

"The histories of England, France, Rome, and Greece," said St. Clair, musing audibly, as he looked slowly along the shelves: "works on natural history, geography—gazetteers—science, useful information, the British poets—a select assortment of novels—travels, voyages, biographies—French grammars and elementary books! Why, Zarah," he suddenly exclaimed, "if you have crammed your head with all these things, you may with the greatest assurance set up as a blue-stocking. I know a host of ladies who pass for being *clever* without half the amount of floating literary capital which you seem to possess. And now perhaps you will tell me whether you have added dancing to your other accomplishments?"

"I have," returned Zarah. "But as I perceive that you are more than half in the vein to treat the whole matter with ridicule, it is not my purpose to afford a proof of my ability in that art."

"And yet why not a waltz?" exclaimed St. Clair, laughing half-gaily, half-superciliously. "In default of music I can hum a tune."

"No," answered Zarah, gravely. "After all the proofs I have given you of the results of my studies in other respects, you may take for granted my skill in the art of dancing."

"Then be it so," replied St. Clair, as he resumed his seat. "And now, my dear Zarah, as I suppose the exhibition part of the ceremonies is at an end, you will at length come to an explanation of the meaning of all this—unless, indeed, I can guess?"

"Pray afforded me the benefit of your conjecture," said my gipsy-friend.

"I will," rejoined St. Clair. "You know that you are handsome—you possess a fine from—and you are still young enough—for If I mistake not, you are barely five-and twently. Your ambition soared above a gipsy life—and you thought you might shine in a certain sphere in the metropolis. You have a craving for a luxurious mode of existence—to dress well—to live in handsome apartments—and perhaps to ride in your carriage. Well, Zarah, all this is laudable enough; and I for one," St. Clair went on to say, speaking somewhat more seriously than hitherto," shall be well pleased to see you in such a position. I understand the means which you purpose to adopt in order to attain it; and I now comprehend likewise wherefore you desired my presence here this evening, and why you have displayed your accomplishments. Yes—I will cheerfully assist you in the matter. I will introduce you to a dozen or so of my fashionable male acquaintances; and I have no doubt that you will speedily receive overtures on very

handsome terms—so that in the course of a few weeks I shall behold you the mistress of some dashing baronet or some infatuated old marquis.

"Captain St. Clair," Zarah, in a voice which quivered somewhat—and I felt assured it was with suppressed indignation, "if it were not for all that has aforetime taken place between you and me, I should not have listened with even ordinary patience to the remarks you have been addressing to me. But under circumstances I foregive you. No!—once for all learn that I have *not* devoted myself day and night for upwards of six long months to the task of self-improvement for any purpose so vile as that which you have conjectured. I would sooner return to the tattered garments of a gipsy than wear this raiment for meretricious objects. If I have been frail, it was with you alone! As there is a heaven above us I have at least proved faithful to that weakness which I demonstrated towards you! Now do you begin to comprehend the aim which I had in view?"

'After all you have just said," replied St. Clair, again with a tincture of superciliousness in his accents, "the only conjecture left for me is that you seek to obtain a position by means of marriage. In this respect I may perhaps also enabled to assist you somewhat——"

"That is the very purpose," interrupted Zarah, "for while I requested you to call upon me this evening! Yes—it is you, and you only, who can forward my views!"

'Perhaps," said St. Clair, "you have already some one in your eye, as your future husband And yet I am at a loss to understand—"

"Yes—I have some one in my eye, as you express it," rejoined Zarah.

"And therefore," continued St. Clair, "as I doubtless know him, you think that—"

"No one knows him better than yourself!" interjected Zarah.

"Ah, by heaven! you are a long time coming to the point," ejaculated St. Clair: "and were it not too supremely ridiculous, I should positively fancy—But no!" and he laughed aloud.

"The suspicion which has entered into your mind," said Zarah, quietly yet firmly, "is the correct one. It is *you*, Captain St. Clair, who will give me the position which I crave and for which I have been preparing myself!"

"Zarah, you are mad!" ejaculated St. Clair, starting up suddenly from his seat.

"I am not mad: I never was more completely possessed of my reason than at this moment. I hope, Captain St. Clair, that we shall have no scene of violence—"

"Violence?—it is ridiculous!" exclaimed St. Clair. "You cannot be serious, Zarah—you are only putting me to some test which I cannot precisely understand. If you want money wherewith to carry on your new game, you shall have it—I will be liberal to you. But—"

"In a pecuniary sense I will be indebted to you no longer!" interrupted Zarah resolutely. "When I asked you to give me a considerable sum of money some six or seven months back, it was my intention to qualify myself to become your wife—"

"My wife!" cried St. Clair contemptuously. "You are raving Zarah!"

"I beseech you to listen to me," she said, in a tone full of calm confidence. "Yes—it was to qualify myself to become your wife! Ignorant and ill-mannered as I was—utterly unacquainted with all but the scantiest rudiments of education—a stranger to the amenities and courtesies of life—I dared not do you so great an injury as to insist that you should conduct me to the altar. Therefore I resolved to wait awhile, and labour most assiduously to round off the asperities which low birth and defective education had left upon my character, my demeanour, and bearing. For this purpose I had no scruple in having recourse to your purse. Were you already married, and if you had children, you would not hesitate to expend hundreds of pounds on the education of any one of them. I therefore considered that you ought not to begrude a certain sum to qualify me for becoming your wife."

"As for the money which I gave you, I care nothing about it," replied Edwin St. Clair; "and if at the time you had demanded twice as much, it would have been yours. But whether I am disposed to gratify this insane idea which you have formed is altogether another thing."

"You will gratify it, Edwin!" said Zarah, calmly: and this was the first time during the present interview that she had addressed him by his Christian name.

"By heaven I will perish sooner!" he vehemently exclaimed.

"Now understand me well, Edwin!" resumed Zarah. "I have loved you devotedly—I still love you, notwithstanding that I know what you are. But beware how you convert all this love into hatred!"

"What! you dare threaten me?" cried St. Clair. "It is for me to bid you be cautious—or I will trample you under foot as I would a worm!"

"You can do me but little injury." rejoined Zarah. "Though certain things have come to my knowledge, yet I myself was not an accomplice in them——"

"And you would turn round upon me?" exclaimed St. Clairs. "Is this your boasted love?—is this your affection?"

"You know the human heart too well, Edwin," answered Zarah, "not to be fully aware that in all its strongest feelings and passion extremes meet. The most fervid love may turn into the most violent hatred; and the woman who at one moment is ready to sacrifice her life for the object of her affection may the next instant be goaded by her revenge to seek the life of him towards whom her love has changed into aversion!"

You are teaching how we stand with regard to each other," responded St. Clair, in the low, concentrated tone of bitterest rage. "But what if I were to defy you, Zarah?—what if I were to bid you do your worst?"

"As there is a heaven above us," she answered, with a certain solemnity, and with a deep impressiveness of voice, I would do it!"

"And send your grandmother to the scaffold," rejoined St. Clair, "along with others whom your infatuated madness and cruel vindictiveness would thus involve in a common ruin!"

He speke these words in a low, bellow voice—so low, indeed, that

I could only just catch the words themselves; and though I dared not peep forth at this juncture, yet I could easily picture to myself that his countenance was ghastly pale and that his whole from trembled visibly.

"There is not the slightest doubt relative to my present intentions," said Zarah. "I am like a desperate person who has cast her whole fate upon the hazard of a die. You shall espouse me—and I will make you a loving wife: or you shall reject me—and even within the hour that is passing will I be signally avenged. To you, Edwin, was my first and only love given. You found me a wild gipsy hoyden of the woods: you avowed that you loved me—you taught me to know what love is: and if for such instruction on your part marriage is the penalty, you must pay it! Though but the poor and humble gipsy, I had my own ideas of virgin pride and dignity; and you brought me down from that proud pedestal. In a word, Edwin, you were my seducer—and you shall become my husband!"

"Zarah!" replied St. Clair, "you know not what you ask of me! If you were better acquainted with the world, you would laugh at your own self for that which you would *then* comprehend to be the most egregious folly. Suppose for an instant that I were to yield and make you my wife: I should become the object of scorn and contempt on the part of all my friends and acquaintances:—and would *you* like to know that your husband was thus the laughing-stock of everybody?"

"Did you not ere now say," inquired Zarah, "that a gentleman may marry his cook-maid, and he thereby renders her a lady. The gentleman does not descend to the level of her whom he espouses: he raises her up to become the sharer of his own position."

"By heavens, Zarah, you will drive me mad!" exclaimed St. Clair, now losing all control over his temper. "Your arguments are monstrous! your reasonings are absurd! You cannot be so insane as to fancy that I shall conduct a low-born gipsy to the altar! Why, my good girl, I have seen you without shoes—in rags——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Zarah, now no longer able to control her own indignant feelings; "you have done well to remind me of all this! It was when I was with naked feet and clothed in rags some five years ago, that you, Edwin St. Clair, addressed me in the language of love!—you thought me worthy of becoming your toy—your mistress!—and you vowed that you would never forget the poor gipsy Zarah! Now behold me clothed in silk—bedecked with lace and with jewellery; and if raiment have anything to do with the heart's affections or with the duty of a man towards a woman, then do I fearlessly proclaim that if in my tatters, my semi-nudity, my coarseness of manner, and my mental ignorance, I were worthy of becoming your mistress—*now* in the gentility of my toilet, in the refinements which I have acquired, and in the enlightenment of my mind, I am worthy of becoming your wife!"

"But how would you meet the world's ridicule?" demanded St. Clair: "or other let me ask how you would enable *me* to meet it?"

"For shame, Edwin!" exclaimed Zarah, in a tone of indignant reproach: how can you appeal

to a woman to teach you your duties as a man? The very moment that any supercilious gaze is fixed upon me, or any mockling laugh falls upon your ear, have you not an arm to strike the insolent one down?—or cannot that hand of your pull the pistol's trigger in a sterner encounter still? It is not Edwin St. Clair who would be at a loss for the means to avenge any slight or insult that might be offered to the woman whom he chose to make his wife!"

"All this would be very well, Zarah," responded St. Clair sarcastically, "if we were living in those times of chivalry when I might buckle on my armour to defend the fair fame of ladye-wife. But unfortunately for your cause the days of chivalry are gone; and I am no Don Quixote to do deeds of knight-errantry in vindication of a Zarah the gipsy who would fain place herself in the position of a Dulcinea del Toboso."

"Even if I had been inclined to waver or to yield in my original resolution," answered Zarah, "this sarcastic language of yours would for very spite's strengthen me in my determination. Learn therefore, Edwin St. Clair, that my resolve in fixed! Make me your wife, and I will do my duty towards you: but refuse, and the whole fabric of your fortune, your brilliant position, and your fame shall crumble around you, overwhelming you with its ruins and I the authoress of this wholesale desolation!"

There a pause of nearly a minute; and then I heard St. Clair ask in a low hoarse voice, "But is it possible, Zarah, that knowing, as you fancy, enough to work me all this tremendous mischief,—knowing, in short, what I *am*"—and here his accents grew even more concertrated in the intenseness of the feeling which they expressed,—"is it possible I ask that with all this knowledge of my antecedents you would venture to become my wife, even if I myself were willing?"

"It is possible!" replied Zarah: "nay, more—of all these things have I thought, and I am resolved to dare and venture whatsoever——"

"Pause! reflect!" interrupted St. Clair: "speak not hurriedly! You know me well—you know me to be a man who will hesitate at nothing to clear his path of obstacles, or to fight his way desperately amidst the perils which best him. Beware therefore how you persevere it this mad design of yours—how you insist upon forcing yourself upon me as a wife!"

"The warning is unnecessary," responded Zarah, again speaking with calmness; "and every additional word you use to divert me from my purpose, is so much waste of breath Once for all——"

"Then by heaven!" cried St. Clair, now again giving way to his fury, "you may do your worst! What! render myself ridiculous before all the world—cut myself out of society—expose myself to the laugh and scorn and contempt! No! sooner would I speed to the nearest bridge and fling myself thence as a suicide!"

"I am not to be deterred by any such threats as these," answered Zarah. "I have no fear that Edwin St. Clair will take and steps so desperate. His egotism and his selfishness are too great to render him a subject for the catalogue of suicides. But this

arguments has lasted long enough ——"

"Yes—too long!" ejaculated St. Clair, fiercely. "Farewell, Zarah —and do your worst!"

Thus speaking he rushed to the door—opened it—and issued from the apartment. Zarah made no moment and said not a word to detain him. He closed the door violently; and I half emerged from my hiding-place, saying, "You have failed, Zarah—you have failed! Now what will you do?"

"I have won--I have conquered!" she quickly responded, her countenance lighting up with the glow of enthusiastic triumph. "Oh, I know that man well! He will return in a few moments—he is only doing this to try m·. If I had rushed after him and sought to detain him, it would have appeared as If I were having recourse to entreaty, and that therefore I was weak in my own purpose and incapable of carrying out the threats which I proclaimed. knows *me*: ond he is aware that when I am determined—Hush! he returns Miss. Percy! Retreat!"

And it was as Zarah had said: for scarcely had I time to draw back into my hiding-place and the door ajar again, when the opposite door opened from the landing, and St. Clair reappeared.

"I do not choose to part from you in anger, Zarah," he said, advancing towards her: "and moreover it struck me as I was hastening down the stairs, that there is a way of settling this matter to your satisfaction, You have qualified yourself to occupy a new position in the world:—what if I were to settle upon you not be content?"

"If you were to lay all your fortune at my feet," replied Zarah "without offering me your hand at the same time, I should repudiate it. My mind is thoroughly made up. And now one word more—and only *one* word! To-morrow morning, at eleven o'clock I expect you to to be here with a special license, and with a minister to join our hands in marriage If you fail me—and if when the hour of noon is proclaimed by the timepiece on that mantel, you are still absent—I shall go straight hence to a magistrate: and without pity or remorse ——"

"Enough, Zarah!" said St. Clair in a voice which seemed to be of a dying tone: "it shall be so! To-morrow at eleven o'clock I will be here, pepared to make you my wife."

Having thus spoken, St. Clair quitted the room; and in a few moments the front door of the house was heard to close. This noise was followed almost immediately by the sounds of his cabriolet dashing along the street; and then I came forth from my hiding-place.

"I told you that I should conquer—and I have succeeded!" exclaimed Zarah, her countenance radiant with triumph. "Now, my dear Miss. Percy, you have learned the secret of my life. I became that man's victim: I erred—I fell—and as he was the author of my ruin so now shall he lift me up as high as he has plunged me down low!"

"But, Zarah" I asked, almost shuddering as I thought of her alliance with such a fearful being as I considered that St. Clair was,—'do you indeed love him?"

"Yes, I love him, Miss Percy, in spite of all his wickedness—in spite of all his crimes!" and it was with a strange hardihood, even bordering upon fierceness, that she made this avowal. "I

have read enough to know that love is an eccentric passion and assumes strange phases Mine is singular; and to you its aspect may even be revolting. Still it exists not less within me. If he should learn to love me—as he once told me that he did—I shall continue to love him, and I will devote myself heart and soul to his welfare. But if he should scorn the wife who has forced herself upon him, and treat me contumely and neglect—then will my love become hatred: but I shall be sufficiently avenged in the knowledge that I have forced him to espouse me. And now you comprehend, Miss. Percy, all that has been mysterious in my past conduct. When you were made a prisoner at my grand-mother's cottage, it was *then* through no feeling of friendship that I accomplished your release: it was because I loved St. Clair, and was jealous! If I furnished you with the means of striking terror into his soul by speaking of the white rose, it was because I was anxious to provide you with a weapon of defence that might thereafter serve you in any emergency brought about by his machinations. The same motive led me to release you from the farm-house; and *then*, when I saw how perseveringly St. Clair was following up his insane passion for you, it struck me that there was something more than mere beauty which so dazzled him. I reflected within myself that if I were well-mannered and accomplished, I should perhaps never have lost his love, and he would not have dared to look upon me as the rejected mistress whose agency he could employ in his machinations to ensnare another. It was then therefore that I resolved to entre upon a new phase of my existence. I craved your succour—your advice — your counsel; — and I craved not in vain. I then learnt to regard you as a frined and to love you. Finally I was resolved to have no secrets from you; and therefore are you here this evening Rest assured that St. Clair will adhere to his pledge: he will come to morrow to espouse me; and whatever his subsequent conduct may be, I shall at all events watch over your interests and zealously guard you against the effects of any future intrigues on his part."

I listened with the deepest attention to all that Zarah thus said; and after some few minutes' meditatiom, I observed in a warning tone, "Beware of this man. He has promised you a certain thing: but may he not have given the pledge in order the more completely to throw you off your guard, and devise some project during the few hours between this moment and eleven in the forenoon to-morrow — a project which may terribly avenge himself for all that you have said and purposed this evening."

"Be not afraid on my account, my dear Miss. Percy," said Zarah, with a tone and look of completest confidence. "I myself entertain no apprehension. Yet sincerely do I thank you for all the kind interest you are displaying on my behalf."

After a little more conversation I took leave of Zarah; and entering a cab, order the driver to conduct me to Hunter Street. During the ride I reviewed everything which had taken place; and while on the one hand I was astonished at the energy, the perseverance, and the firmness which had characterized Zarah's

entire conduct, from the very first day she commenced her studies until the final moment when she extorted an assent from St. Clair's lips—yet on the other hand I continued to entertain the apprehension that St. Clair would not yield irrevocably without at least one desperate effort to emancipate himself from such thraldom. Indeed, I knew him too well to suppose that he would resign himself to such a destiny and accept such a fate, without a struggle to avoid it. In the fist instance he had seduced Zarah from the path of virtue: he had then thrown her off; and his own estimate of the mere passing amour might be judged from the fact that he had sought to avail himself of the services of that very cast-off mistress to keep guard, jointly with her grandmother, upon myself, on the two occasions which the reader will remember so well—namely, at the cottage between Birmingham and Embledon, and at the farm-house in the vicinage of Highbury. That he should have thus treated Zarah was a sufficient proof of the indifference or even contempt in which he had held alike her heart's best feelings and her own self:—and was it therefore probable that he would now abandon himself to the fate of receiving such a bride without some desperate effort to rid himself of her altogether? I could not help thinking that there was a little vanity mixed up in Zarah's disposition and conduct. She had evidently fancied that the acquirement of lady-like manners as well as of mental accomplishments—the tasteful embellishment of her person—the invocation of the aids of the toilet to set off her beauty—and her self-investment as it were with a gloss of gentility, would combine to reconcile St. Clair to the acceptation of her as his bride. She had no doubt calculated that when yielding to necessity, he would say within himself, "Well, after all, she will not disgrace me as a wife. I may even perhaps be proud of her!"

But if all these were really Zarah's hopes, calculations, and expectances, I was fully convinced that her wonted keenness, shrewdness, and foresight had for once failed her, and that Edwin St. Clair was *not* the man to succumb so easily.

CHAPTER X.

WILLIAM LARDNER.

I REACHED Hunter Street with this apprehension even more strongly fixed in my mind than when I had first mentioned it to Zarah: and I said to myself, "I wish that I could adopt some plan to guard and protect her for the twelve or thirteen hours which are to elapse until the arrival of the moment when St. Clair is to keep his promise. If she pass *this* night in safety—and if the hour of eleven in to-morrow's forenoon were to strike and she still at freedom, beyond the reach of whatsoever toils St. Clair might set to entrap her—she would then be completely mistress of the situation: she would be the arbitress of his destiny!"

It was about half-past ten o'clock when I alighted from the cab in Hunter Street, and after having reflected for a few minutes in the drawing-room, I resolved to consult Beda. I accordingly summoned her to my presence; and I said, "Something has

occurred which renders me apprehensive that danger menaces our friend Zarah. She herself will not however admit that she incurs this peril; and so great is her confidence on the point, that I could not induce her to adopt any precaution."

"At whose hands, miss," inquired Beda, "does Zarah incur this peril?"

"At the hands of Captain St. Clair," I responded. "My apprehension is altogether vague and indefinite—I am unable to form the slightest conjecture as to the shape in which the pending treachery may show itself: but I fear that the night will not pass without something serious or even fatal happening to Zarah."

"What can I do, miss?" inquired Beda. "But Ah!" she suddenly ejaculated; "there is one"—and then a slight blush appeared upon her cheeks,—"one who would do anything to oblige you, miss—or myself—he would keep watch—"

"To whom do you refer, Beda?" I asked.

"To William Lardner, miss," she rejoined. "He is at his moment down-stairs in the servants' room. His ship will clear out of Blackwall in two or three days: he came to bid me farewell; and he was just on the point of taking his leave when the bell rang to summon me into your presence.

"This is most fortunate, Beda!" I exclaimed; "and your idea is an excellent one! Let William Lardner come up to me."

Beda glided from the room: and in a few moments she returned, ushering in the good-looking young sailor, who evinced much pleasure in seeing me again. I quickly gave him the same brief explanations which I had already given to Beda; and it was with something more than mere willingness—it was with enthusiastic delight that he offered to serve me in any way that I might point out I inquired when he must return to his ship?—and he assured me that if he were on board the East Indiaman by noon on the ensuing day, it would suffice. I accordingly acquainted him with the street and the number of the house in which Zarah dwelt; and I bade him go and keep such watch as circumstances should enable him to maintain. He had no liking for Edwin St. Clair: his honest mind had been shocked by all the transactions relative to the yacht at Ramsgate; and he had therefore no hesitation in adopting a course which might be inimical to the views, schemes, and interests of his late master. I informed him that I should purposely rise very early in the morning, in case he had anything of importance to communicate: and having thus given him all requisite instructions, I despatched him on his mission.

My mind now felt more easy; for I knew that William Lardner was perfectly trustworthy as well as intelligent and courageous; and if nothing should happen, Zarah need not know that I had taken this precaution—whereas, on the other hand, if treachery should indeed display itself, that precaution might not prove to be without its uses. Mr. and Mrs. Norman and Juliet returned home from the theatre shortly after eleven o'clock and I then retired to rest.

I arose at about six in the morning; and Beda, who occupied an ante-chamber, was already dressed. She descended to the front door:

she found William Lardner pacing to and fro in the street; and she at once gave him admittance. After exchanging a few words with him, she returned to my chamber and told me that something had indeed occurred, as I had foreseen. My toilet was speedily made: and I descended to the dining-room, where William Lardner was refreshing himself with the viands and drinkables that had been laid for the previous night's supper, and which had not as yet been cleared away. I will give his narrative as he told it to me:—

"Immediately on leaving this house, a little before eleven last night, I took a cab and proceeded to the West End. I alighted at the corner of the street which you mentioned to me, miss; and I walked leisurely to and fro for about half-an-hour. During all this time I saw a light burning in the front drawing-room on the first floor; and once or twice I perceived a female figure passing behind the curtains: so that I was tolerably confident that this was Zarah and that nothing had as yet happened to her. It was close upon twelve o'clock when a cab drew up at a short distance from the house and three persons got out. One was a stout elderly gentleman, dressed in black, and carrying a gold-headed cane: the other two were men of some inferior condition—and I did not like their looks. I drew as near as I could without standing the chance of exciting suspicion that I was thus on the watch: and I saw the stout gentleman and the two men proceed to the house in which Zarah dwelt. The gentleman gave a slight rap at the front door: and then I felt all the more convinced that some that some mischief was brewing: for it seemed intended as if this mode of knocking should not startle Zarah nor put her on her guard. The door was presently opened by a female-servant: the gentleman and his two followers at once entered; and the door was shut. The cab then proceeded slowly a little way along the street—turned round—and drew up right opposite the front door. With out a moment's hesitation I went up to the cabman, put a sovereign into his hand, and said, 'Tell me what is the meaning of all this?'—'why, my man,' he at once answered, 'it's a little bit of lunacy affair, and that's all.'—'Where are you going to take the person to?' demanded.—'I don't know, he replied: 'that gentleman and his two men got out of an omnibus down in Piccadilly, and at once called me off the stand. They told me in a few words that they were going to take a patient to an asylum, and that therefore I must not mind anything she said. The stout gentleman assured me it was all right, as the medical certificates had been signed; and so you see, my man, the business is straightforward enough. It isn't the first time I have had to do a bit of work of this 'sort'—'Well,' I immediately said, 'I am interested in the matter: and if, when you have returned from taking the patient to the asylum, you will meet me again, I will give you another sovereign. But not a word to the doctor or his men!'—'All right,' answered the cab-driver: and he named a public-house in some struct oft Piccadilly, which keys open all nights and where he promised to join me. I then hastened away to a little distance; and in a few moments I saw the front door open, and a female, who seemed to be struggling violently, was hastily

borne out between the two men and thrust into the cab. She was crying loudly for help: several persons stopped: I rushed back to the spot, as if attracted by those cries: but a policeman, on receiving some hurried intimation from the old gentleman with the gold-headed cane, said it was all right. That gentleman jumped into the cab, which his men had already entered: the windows were drawn up; and the vehicle dashed away at a rapid rate. I don't think that the whole proceeding, from the instant that the front door opened for the men to come out with poor Zarah, until the cab drove off, occupied more than a minute."

"And did the driver keep his appointment with you?" I anxiously asked.

"Oh, yes, miss," replied William Lardner: "there was no fear of his disappointing me: he had another sovereign to earn. You will of course understand, miss, that the instant I found it was a lunacy-affair—though no doubt a pretended one—I was compelled to keep myself quiet: I dared not interfere for the rescue of poor Zarah—I should only have been given into custody—and that would have made matters worse instead of bettering them."

"Yes, you could not have acted otherwise than you have done," I hastily interjected: "your conduct was most discreet under the circumstances. But now for the remainder of your narrative?"

"I went to the public-house," continued William Lardner; "and there I sat for a good hour and a half before the cabman made his appearance. Indeed it was about half-past one o'clock in the morning when he came: and he then gave me the information I wanted. He told me that he had driven to an asylum right at the end of Notting Hill: it stands all alone up a by-road to the right: it is called Norland House; and the name of the doctor himself is Beresford. And now, miss, I have nothing more to say."

I expressed my sincere thanks to William Lardner for the services that he had rendered; and I insisted that he should accept from me the sum of ten guineas, which I placed in his hand. He would have declined to receive a single shilling more than the amount which he had actually expended: but I declared that I should feel hurt and angry if he refused, and that on no future occasion should I ever avail myself of his services. He therefore yielded, and I felt him alone for a few minutes with Beda, that he might bid her farewell.

I ascended to my chamber, and sat down to reflect upon the course which was now to be adopted My estimate of St. Clair's character had not been wrongly made: his fiendish capacity for mischief had indeed devised a terrible means of ridding himself of Zarah. I knew enough of the infamous lunacy laws to be well aware that if a couple of unprincipled surgeons, lured by bribes, had signed a particular certificate—and that if Dr. Beresford was also one of those willing instruments of mischief whom such a villain as St. Clair seldom fails to pick up with readiness—Zarah's position was indeed a most awkward one. The law was entirely again her; while the whole fiction of it, with all its associated iniquity, was completely on the side of St. Clair. There was consequently no authority to whom I could appeal on Zarah's behalf and yet I was resolved not

to abandon her. I now saw that cunning must be met by cunning and artifice must be encountered by artifice. Already certain plans were suggesting themselves to my mind; and I had matured them by the time Beda made her appearance, at the expiration of about ten minutes,—she having taken leave of William Lardner.

I explained to Beda enough of the lunacy laws to convince her how completely Zarah was now vanquished by her merciless enemy, unless we took speedy measures for her rescue.

"For the next six month's," I observed, "she may remain in a madhouse before the visiting Commissioners can be appealed to on her behalf. During that interval a studied system of cruel treatment may drive her really mad; and this is doubtless the aim to which the villain St. Clair is now looking. It is therefore a paramount necessity that we should enter upon our proceedings at once. The first step is to establish medium of commnication with Zarah; and you, Beda, must become that medium."

"I will do everything, miss, that you command me," replied the willing girl.

"You must go boldly to Norland House," I continued, "and tell Doctor Beresford that you have been appointed by Captain St. Clair to attend upon Zarah. He will at once believe you: he will see that you know everything connected with the circumstances: he will therefoore be thrown completely off his guard; and he will even fancy that you must have received some special instructions from St. Clair in reference to the mode of treatment to be observed towards Zarah. Indeed, you can throw out a hint to this effect—"

"But if in the course of the day," remarked Beda, "the Doctor should communicate with Captain St. Clair and discover that I have practised this deception——"

"He could but expel you from his house, Beda," I rejoined.

"Oh! it is not of my own personal safety I am thinking," she ejaculated. "I would dare anything and everything for poor Zarah's sake: for never can I forget that it was through her I became introduced to you!"

"No matter, my dear Beda," I resumed, "if in the course of the day you should be compelled to leave Norland House. The grand object is in the first instance for you to obtain access to Zarah, if only for a single hour. You will convey to her the assurance that the treacherous plot of which she has become a victim, is known to those who will befriend her; and thus she will be relieved of the horrible idea that the darkest mystery envelopes her fare. You will see likewise what she herself may suggest, and whether by the aid of friends out-of-doors she may effect her escape. Furthermore, you will be enabled to take a survey of the internal arrangements of the asylnm; and thus we shall not be working altogether in the dark. It is just probable that no communication at all may take place during the day between Doctor Beresford and Captaid St. Clair: and if fortunate should so far favour us, your visit to the asylum may be productive of speedy and important results."

I then gave Beda some farther instructions in respect to the course which she was to pursue; and she at once took her depar-

ture. When I joined the Normans at the breakfast-table, I accounted for the visit of a young sailor to the house at such an hour in the morning, by stating that he was much attached to Beda, and that by my permission he had come to bid her farewell previous to finally joining his ship. I have before said that the Normans had no undue curiosity; and in respect to my actions they were never accustomed to question me farther than I chose to instruct them on any point. I thought it very probable that my services would be required in the evening on behalf of Zarah: at all events I was determined to be prepared for such a contingency; and I therefore resolved to excuse myself from appearing at the theatre. This I did on the usual plea of indisposition; and the Normans were not surprised when they heard me state that I was indisposed—for the excitement which I had sustained on Zarah's account had rendered me pale and had given me a care-worn look.

At about twelve o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Norman went to the theatre, as usual, accompanied by Juliet,—all three for the purposes of rehearsal; and I soon afterwards set out for Notting Hill, according to an understanding to which I had come with Beda. I proceeded in a cab, and alighted in the neighbourhood of the road in which Norland House was situated. I had purposely dressed myself with great plainness: I had on a thick veil: and I looked carefully about to see that St. Clair was not anywhere in the neighbourhood. I did not entertain much apprehension on this point: for I thought that when once he learnt that Zarah was in safe custody in the lunatic-asylum, he would consider that his plan was fully accomplished and he would not trouble himself much more on her behalf.

After walking about for a little time, and not seeing anything of Beda, I turned into the by-road itself and passed by Norland House. It was only a small establishment: but it had a picturesque appearance; for at one extremity immense vines claimed up the walls and festooned about the windows. These windows had all Venetian blinds: but of those in the other parts of the asylum, some were barred to the top of the lower sash—while others again were completely protected by gratings from top to bottom. The structure stood in the midst of a small garden, the walls of which were very high: but through the iron gateway I could obtain a full view of the house. I walked to the end of the road, where it abruptly joined some fields, for it was unfinished; and I then retraced my way towards the main road, in which I had agreed to meet Beda in case circumstances should render it advisable for her to come forth from the asylum on some pretext or another.

I had not waited long before I beheld the faithful girl tripping towards me; and when I was convinced that she had caught sight of me, I proceeded still farther, so as to reach a spot where there was no fear of our movements being observed by any one connected with the asylum. She joined me; and I at once saw by the expression of her countenance that everything was going on well.

"You have succeeded, Beda," I said, "in obtaining access to Zarah?"

"Yes—immediately on my arrival," responded the girl. "I was first of all conducted to a room where I found the Doctor and his wife; and with all the hardihood that I could muster to my aid I told them that I had been sent by Captain St. Clair to be attached entirely to the person of Zarah. Doctor Beresford looked at me significantly, and said, 'I suppose, then, that you have some special instructions?—I answered that I had,—'Well, well,' he said,' I do not inquire what they are. Captain St. Clair, who has interested himself of this poor mad creature, knows what he is about; and it is for us to give you every assistance and to afford you every facility in carrying out his views.' He then asked if I were not myself of the gipsy race?—I replied that I was. Mrs. Beresford then jained in the conversation: and she said with a look full of some strange meaning, 'I suppose we are to consider you as being entirely devoted to the interests of Captain St. Clair?'—I again gave a response in the affirmative: and the lady then conducted me to a chamber, where I found Zarah seated with a female keeper, who presently left the room."

"And how does poor Zarah endure her calamity?" I asked

"She was in complete possession of her presence of mind," continned Beda, "when I was usherd to her room; for when Mrs. Beresford proposed to conduct me thither, I was apprehensive lest in a sudden transport of joy at beholding a friendly face, Zarah might betray feelings calculated to excite a suspicion in the old lady's mind. But merely flinging a look upon me, she said with assumed coldness, 'Ah, is it you?'—Mrs. Beresford then retired; and when the door closed upon us, Zarah starting up, caught me in her arms."

"Ah! I can easily picture to myself," I said, "the joy that she must have experienced!"

"And it was therefore a wonder," added Beda, "that she should have exercised so strong a control over her feelings when first I made my appearance. But she told me that she was at once smitten with the conviction that I had by some artifice obtained admission to her, and that everything might therefore depend on the way in which she received me. She calculated reasonably enough that if I had presented myself at the asylum as *a friend*, the door would have been closed against me. But oh! my dear Miss. Percy, nothing can exceed the gratitude which she experiences towards you for the precaution you took in having some one to watch over her safety: for amidst all her painful thoughts, the most horrible idea was that she had suddenly passed as it were out of the midst of the great world into that sepulchre of an asylum, without leaving a trace behind!"

"And I suppose that she is most bitter and vindicative," I said, "against Edwin St. Clair?"

"She yearns to effect her escape," Beda answered, "in order that she may accomplish some aim with which you, miss, are acquainted, and which she has promised to explain to me."

"And is there any chance," I asked, "for Zarah to effect her escape?"

"Yes—every chance!" rejoined Beda. "Indeed, the whole scheme is settled; and it is to be put into practice this evening, provided

that Captain St. Clair in the meantime does not discover that I have obtained access to Zarah. But I hope and trust that there is little risk of such discovery, for the reason that I will presently explain."

"Every additional syllable you utter, my dear Beda," I said "infuses fresh joy into my heart. Continue your explanations in your own way. But perhaps I may as well inform you that I just now passed by the asylum, and took a scrutinizing view of its exterior through the iron gateway."

"Ah! then you will all the more easily comprehend the explanations which I have to give!" exclaimed Beda. "You have seen that the house is a small one; it is only fitted up to contain about fourteen or sixteen female lunatics; and there are not more than six or siven there at the present time. The house is handsomely furnished; and as Doctor Beresford is paid four or five hundred pounds a-year for each inmate, you may suppose that it is a profitable business, even with the limited number of patients that he now possesses."

"And particularly," I added, "considering how unscrupulously he conducts the business, and what large fees may at times pass into his hands in the form of bribes But continue, Beda. I am most anxious to learn what plan you have devised for poor Zarah's escape."

"You perhaps noticed, miss," proceeded the faithful girl, that there are some rooms on that sine wnere the venes cover the walls, which have no bars?"

"Yes—I observed them," I said "they have Venetian shutters."

"The same," rejoined Beda. "But as you may suppose, it was not in one of those rooms that I found Zarah. Her chamber is well protected with iron bars. The rooms with the undefended windows and the Venetian blinds, are for lun tics of an entirely harmless nature, and concerning whom no apprehension of escape is entertained: whereas on the other hand Doctor and Mrs. Beresford have perhaps too good reason to know that Zarah would grasp at the slightest opportunity of flight."

"Besides," I interjected, "it may doubtless suit their purpose to represent Zarah as a confirmed and dangerous lunatic; so that she may be surrounded by all possible circumstances of tyranny, terrorism, and coercion."

"All this is doubtless within their calculations," answered Beda "When I was first introduced to Zarah's chamber this morning, the door was locked: but before Mrs. Beresford retired, she gave me the key, bidding me secure the door internally. and to be sure to keep the key about my own person. These instructions she gave aside in a low whisper. In short, my dear Miss, Percy, I can calculate upon being the custodian of the key for a certain period. At about twelve o'clock some refreshments were brought up into the room by a female keeper, who was followed by Mrs. Beresford. This lady asked me if I would like to look over the house; and I at once replied that I should. I will not waste precious time by telling you anything about the lunatic inmates whem I saw: but I will hasten to explain that I found all the rooms with the Venetian blinds to be unoccupied. These are the rooms, yau recollect which have the windows without

bars. Mrs. Beresford conversed familiarly with me; and I threw out several hints to confirm the suspicion which she and her husband had from the first entertained, to the effect that I had received special and private instructions from Captain St. Clair with reference to Zarah's treatment. Before I parted from Mrs. Beresford, after going over the house, I casually remarked that I should presently be compelled to go up into London to fetch some little things which I had forgotten to bring with me in my boxes; and Mrs. Beresford showed me a bell-pull in the passage, so that I might always summon one of the female keepers—or nurses, by the bye, as they are called—to occupy my place with Zarah when I wished to absent myself. On again being alone with Zarah, I communicated to her the fact that all the rooms with the Venetian blinds were untenanted."

"And now I begin to comprehend," I said, "the plan of escape. Is it not to watch a favourable opportunity to issue from the chamber with the barred windows,—you fortunately being the holder of the key,—to pass into one of the rooms with the Venetian blinds, and thence effect your egress by the window?"

"Such is the project," answered Beda: "but it will not be unattended with risk and danger. At the summit of the staricase on every landing, there is a door which as kept fast locked. If I wish to issue forth from Zarah's chamber, I must ring the bell in the landing to summon the nurse to open the door at the head of the staircase. Thus, you see, all the occupants of rooms on each particular floor are confined to that floor itself; for even if their doors be open, they can neither ascend to the floor above, nor descend to the one below, without the aid of a nurse to open the massive doors on the landing."

"I understand, Beda. On what floor is Zarah's chamber?" I inquired.

"On the second floor," replied Beda; "and therefore you perceive that on issuing from her chamber, we must penetrate into one of the two rooms with the Venetain windows which are on the same floor. It will be a height of at least thirty-five feet from which we shall have to descend; and herein exists the danger. But Zarah quails not thereat; and as for myself, I would dare it were it twice the height."

"You are a brave girl, Beda," I said; "and as for Zarah, she is far from being deficient in courage. What more have you to tell me?"

"The length of time occupied by Mrs. Beresford in showing me over the house," continued Beda, "left me but a comparatively little while for the arrangement and digestion of this plan with Zarah. when we again found ourselves alone together, I knew that I must be keeping you waiting, miss,—as the hour at which you were to be in this neighbourhood, had arrived and was past; but still I was convinced you would have patience."

"Oh! I should have remained here until the evening, Beda, rather than have missed you. But proceed."

"At length, my dear miss, everything being settled between me and Zarah, I rang the bell for the nurse—surrendered her up the key of the chamber—and intimated that I might be absent for

an hour or two. Moreover, in order to keep up appearances, I whispered to her that she must maintain a sharp eye upon Zarah, for that I feared she might be wickedly inclined towards any-one else, though I myself had the means of influencing and controlling her. As I was passing through the garden, I met Doctor and Mrs. Beresford, who were walking there together. They stopped me for a moment, and then inquired whether, as I was going up into London, I should be likely to see Captain St. Clair? I at once boldly answered that I thought it very probable I might see him. 'In that case,' said the Doctor, 'you can tell him that the patient was carried off last night with as little noise as possible: the landlady of the house readily believed that Zarah's brain was turned for she thought she had noticed something wild and peculiar about her. As for the rest,' added Doctor Beresford, 'you can assure the Captain that the patient is in safe keeping, and that his wishes shall be carried out in every respect.' I promised to deliver these messages; and now you understand miss, why I said just now that I do not think it at all probable any communication will actually take place between the doctor and Captain St. Clair for the remainder of the day. On issuing from the asylum, I came straight to you."

"Everything has progressed," I observed, "in a manner favourable to our designs. When do you propose to attempt the grand exploit?"

"This is the main difficulty," resumed Beda, "Immediately the dusk sets in—as I learnt from Mrs, Beresford's lips—she herself makes the round, locks all the chambers and takes away the keys."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "Then in that case, Beda, you will *not* be the custodian of the key of Zarah's chamber when evening comes."

"But I shall be in possession of that key up till dusk," rejoined the faithful girl; and the attempt must therefore be made while the twilight lasts, a quarter of an hour or ten minutes previous to the commencement of the old lady's rounds."

"And if there be any persons walking in the garden," I observed, "the attempt cannot be made?"

"We must not, my dear miss," replied Beda, with a smile, "flatter ourselves that everything is to progress smoothly. There are difficulties to be encountered and risks to be run in all ventures of this kind. But it fortunately happens that at the extremity of the passage on the second floor, Zarah and I may this evening have our choice of a front or a back room with undefended windows, as the scene of our operations. These will be rapidly conducted: and if we catch a glimpse of any persons in the *front* garden, we must descend from the *cab* window—or the reverse, according to circumstances. And now, my dear miss I come to that point which relates to the assistance that you yourself are to render."

"Only tell me the part that I am to play," was my quick response, "and I shall not disappoint you."

"We may escape from the window," continued Beda; "but there will be still another escape to effect—and this is from the garden itself. The walls are very high, as you have doubtless noticed: the iron gates are always locked—and there is a watchful porter in the lodge. We must climb that part of the wall which is exactly opposite the extremity

of the house where the vines festoon about the Venetian windows front and back. But fortunately there are no windows in the side of the house itself; and thus the escape over the garden-wall at the point I have named, stands little chance of being observed. Precisely at sunset, you, miss, must be in the neighbourhood, provided with a rope-ladder to throw over the wall to us. Let the extremities of the cords have stout wooden pegs, which we may drive slantwise into the ground, so as to retain the ladder fixed in a sloping position, you know—just like the cords of a tent. Then a cab in waiting at a little distance—and that is all you will be required to do!"

I cheerfully undertook everything that I was thus asked to perform; and after a little more conversation with Beda, in respect to certain minute details, we separated. I hastened back into London: and before returning to Hunter Street, I purchased a sufficient quantity of common bell-pull cord for the manufacture of the rope-ladder. On reaching home, I shut myself in my own chamber, and set busily to work at the task which I had in hand. This occupied me somewhat longer than I had expected; for it was necessary to fasten the various cross-pieces with a considerable degree of strength, and also to introduce two or three steps of wood in order to keep the sides of the ladder conveniently apart. While engaged with my labour, I reviewed everything that Beda had told me; and I considered that the chances of Zarah's escape were considerably in her favour. Yet I was not too sanguine; for I saw that everything depended upon the absence of any communication between the Beresfords and St Clair.

It being the first day of September, the sun set at about a quarter to seven; and a little before that time I was in the neighbourhood of Norland House, according to my promise. The cab which had brought me, was concealed behind a clump of trees at a little distance from the asylum; and by the liberality of my promises, as well as by means of a handsome earnest of my good intentions, I gave the driver to understand that there was some business of a delicate and important nature to be accomplished. I had the rope-ladder rolled up into the narrowest possible compass, and concealed beneath my scarf: I placed myself in such a position with regard to the house that I could obtain a view of the windows from either of which the descent might be effected. And now, for several minutes, I was a prey to the utmost suspense. Those difficulties which I had hitherto glanced so lightly at, appeared to take more colossal proportions the nearer instant drew when they would have to be grappled with. But I need not dwell farther on all the hurried reflections that I made during that brief period in which hope and fear were thus clashing: I will continue the thread of my narrative.

The last rays of the setting sun glimmered in the horizon; and the interval of twilight succeeded. In a short time, as my eyes were fixed upon the spot where all my interest was now concentrated, I could discern through the gathering gloom some small white object within one of the windows around which the vines festooned. Then the lower sash

of that window was opened: I could distinguish the white object more plainly: it was a kerchief that was being waved as a signal to me; for both Beda and Zarah felt assured that I was on the look-out from some point were they themselves could not distinguish me. And almost immediately afterwards I could discern two forms at the open window; and then a length of rope, or rather of material formed of sheets and blankets and curtains torn into strips, which were fastened together, was rapidly unrolled from the window. Ah! it was Beda that was about to descend first! it was she who had insisted upon testing with her lighter form the strength of the rope, ere the heavier person of Zarah should be committed to it. For a few moments the young girl sat crouching down upon the window-sill—I knew not whether her courage failed her, or whether it were that she was listening attentively for the last time to assure herself that no footsteps were approaching in the garden. Ah! I ought not to have fancied that she was deficient in fortitude even for a single instant: for now she was grasping the upper part of the rope—she was gliding down it until the wall of the garden concealed her from my view! I just waited until I beheld Zarah commencing the descent—and then I sped close up to the wall where I remained, getting the rope-ladder in hasty readiness to be thrown over.

In about a minute my ear caught the sounds of light footsteps on the opposite side of the wall; and a small stone or piece of earth was thrown over to me. This was a signal previously agreed upon between myself and Beda; and I lost not an instant in obeying it. I threw the rope-ladder over the wall, making the extremity on my side fast to the trunk of a small tree. A few moments elapsed, during which Zarah and Beda were driving the pegs on their side into the ground and then I had the satisfaction of beholding the countenance of Zarah appear above the wall. Her escape was quickly consummated; and she strained me in her arms. Beda's light form now dropped from the wall; and we all three hastened to the cab. We took our seats in the vehicle; and it drove away at a rapid rate.

Zarah overwhelmed me with thanks for the part which I had played in thus enabling her to escape from the lunatic asylum; and I profered her my sincerest congratulations on the event. We both of us lavished fittting eulogies upon the conduct of Beda in the transaction; and when all these first feelings of rejoicing had found their vent, I thought it absolutely necessary to discuss Zarah's future plans of proceeding. In the first instance it was necessary for her to consider whither she would go; for I did not suppose that she intended to return to the lodgings whence she had been forcibly carried away. On this point I found that her mind was already made up; she had decided upon going back to her former place of abode near the London Uuiversity.

We discoursed freely in the presence of Beda; for the young girl had proved herself by her fidelity and intelligence to be in every way worthy of this confidnce. Indeed, Zarah had already initiated her during the afternoon into many details of her late proceedings and her present plans in respect to Edwin St. Clair.

"You must act with the utmost circumspection, Zarah," I said; "for you will bear in mind that Doctor Beresford, armed with a medical certificate, may seize you wherever he may find you and bear you back to his asylum."

"I have not lost sight of that fact, my dear Miss. Percy," answered Zarah. "I have suffered once through an overweening confidence in the success of my plans as I had sketched them out: but the lesson has perhaps been a salutary one."

"And is it possible, Zarah," I asked, "that you still think of linking your fate with that of a man who is capable of so much villany?"

"Nothing can alter that resolve on my part," rejoined Zarah: and as her eyes flashed fiercely, she added, "I will compel him to take me as his wife, were it only to punish him the more effectually. Ah, my dear Miss. Percy! my love has well-nigh turned into hate; and Oh! I must be avenged! If his proud spirit scorn me—if his haughty disposition condemn the gipsy-bride, I must humble him—I must bring him down very low! And this will do."

Her lips where then compressed with the fiercest resolutions and for some few minutes there was silence—for. I was reflecting mournfully upon what Zarah's destiny might possibly be if she persisted in compelling that young man of dark villanies and of fiend-like machinations to conduct her to the altar.

"Yes," resumed Zarah at length, "my resolve is irrevocably fixed: and since I now find that it will indeed prove a terrible chastisement for Edwin St. Clair to make the gipsy his bride, it will be with all the greater satisfaction that I myself shall inflict the punishment. But here we are at the lodgings."

The cab stopped in front of the house in the neighbourhood of the London University; and Zarah, bidding us remain in the vehicle for a few moments, alighted. After a brief interchange of words with the landlady of the house, she returned to us to intimate that the lodgings were not let and that she could retake possession of them. I and Beda accordingly descended from the cab—the driver of which was rewarded with even a greater liberality than I had promised.

"And now, Zarah," I said, when we were all three seated in the parlour of the lodgings, "what step is next to be taken?"

"With your permission, my dear Miss. Percy," answered Zarah, "I must continue to avail myself of the assistance of Beda. By the course which she has already adopted on my behalf, she has thrown off the mask, as it were towards those who fancied that in her they possessed a docile agent for their iniquities. St. Clair—who already knows that Beda is in your service, and who has doubtless been hugging the hope that she has not failed to administer the poisened lozenges—will now suddenly comprehend that she is imbued with principles and that she entertains sympathies which render her very different from that for which she has been taken. He can scarcely fail to suspect that *you*, my dear Miss. Percy, have aided Beda in accomplishing my rescue; and at all events the faithful girl, by her conduct of this day, has proved that she can no longer be looked upon as a willing agent for the criminal intentions of my wret

ched grandmother, Edwin St. Clair, or Lady Lilla Essendine."

"Yes." I observed, "Beda must henceforth appear in a new light to the view of those persons."

"And therefore," continued Zarah, "it cannot be in the least prejudicial to your interests, my dear Miss Percy, if Beda continues for the present to serve me in the carrying out of my own views?"

"Decidedly not," I rejoined. "But even if it were otherwise, I sohuld not be selfish enough, Zarah to consider my own interests in opposition to yours. What can Beda do for you?"

"You remember, my dear Miss Percy," continued Zarah, "that you once consulted me on a particular project which you had in view as a means of protecting yourself against the machinations of St. Clair. You told me that you purposed to pen a narrative of everything you knew or suspected concerning him—which narrative you should entrust to the keeping of some faithful friend ——"

"I remember full well, Zarah!" I interrupted her. "You dissuaded me from the plan—and I did not adopt it. But wherefore do you make allusion to it now?"

"Because it has proved suggestive to my mind on the present occasion," replied Zarah. "You shall see how. Beda, my dear young friend, I am about to entrust you with a mission which I know you will execute faithfully; and I am likewise convinced that you will accomplish it firmly and courageously. Will you proceed on my behalf to Captain St. Clair?"

"I will," answered Beda.

"If he be not already acquainted with the intelligence," continued Zarah, "you may inform him that I have escaped from the asylum to which his villany had consigned me. But doubtless that intelligence *has* been by this time conveyed to him from Norland House. Tell him, Beda, that his triumph was of short duration, and that it has only rendered me all the more resolute in carrying out my views, so that I may triumph in my turn. Tell him likewise that to-morrow, at eleven 'o-clock punctually, you will return to his abode to conduct him to my residence—to which he must be in readiness to repair under precisely the same circumstances as those which I had sketched forth for eleven o'clock *this* morning. He will know what you mean. But this is not all, Beda. Tell him that a written statement of everything I know concerning himself and Lady Lilla Essendine is in the hands of a faithful friend of mine, who is positively instructed to present that statement to the proper authorities to-morrow, at the hour of noon precisely, unless this friend should previously receive a counter-order from my lips. This is the extent of the message which you have to convey to Captain St. Clair. Fear not on your own account, Beda: with this threat hanging over his head, he will not dare touch a single hair of yours!"

"Oh, I entertain no fear!" exclaimed the young girl, starting up from her seat: and in a few moments the door closed behind her.

CHAPTER XI.

ZARAH AND ST. CLAIR.

I RESOLVED to remain with Zarah until Beda's return; for I

was anxious to become acquainted with the result of her mission to St. Clair. It was not now more than half-past nine in the evening, and I was therefore in no hurry to return to Hunter Street. Zarah and I conversed together during Beda's absence—which lasted for about an hour and a half; and again did I endeavour to induce my gipsy-friend to reflect calmly upon the proceeding which she was adopting in reference to St. Clair.

"It is a delicate topic for me to touch upon, Zarah," I said: "but still I feel it my duty to approach it once more. What hope of happiness can you entertain in forcing this man into an alliance with you? You can never expect to win his love; and even if you did the love of such a being—Oh! is it not a frightful thing?"

"If he give me not his love," anwered Zarah, "I will give him my hatred. Perhaps it is in hatred that I am now acting; and if so, no wonder!—for there has been too much of love—it has undone me—and I will have a little of hatred. Yes, yes!—if St. Clair so wills it, away with love!

"But this is a fearful destiny, Zarah," I earnestly remonstrated, "that you are preparing for yourself."

"And yet it is the destiny which I shall embrace with satisfaction," she rejoined. "Oh; my dear Miss. Percy! with you I may be candid. Is not my ambition to be gratified? Or call it vanity if you will; and if vanity, it must be ministered unto. In the eyes of the world St. Clair occupies a brilliant poisition: it will be a proud thing to become his wife!"

"And a dangerous thing, Zarah," I interjected.

"I shall be upon my guard, she instantaneously replied. "When once we are linked together, our relative positions will be altered. I shall have upon him the claims of a wife: the law will be my protection; and as for the insidious workings of those mischiefs of which, alas! he is only too capable—I shall bid him beware lest at the very first cause which I may have to suspect him of foul play, I suddenly lift the veil from before the dark mysteries of his life. And moreover, my dear Miss. Percy you yourself must acknowledge that matters between St. Clair and me have now reached that point at which I cannot stop and from which I dare not retrograde, even if I were inclined to do so. If I become not his wife, he might plunge me back again into a mad-house: but he will not dare take such a step with one whom he has deemed sane and fitting enough to accompany him to the altar. If he treat me only with cold neglect, I shall care nothing so long as I enjoy my due share of the wealth which he possess—the luxuries and the splendours which those ample means furnish. Let him, if he will, live in one part of his house and I in another. Oh! I can assure you," added Zarah, her lips wreathing with scorn and her large dark eyes flashing fire, "he will not be enabled to break my heart by such treatment as this!"

Finding that Zarah was fully resolved upon pursuing the course which she had chalked out for herself, I at length desisted from further argument; and we conversed on other subjects until Beda's return. Her absence, as I have said, lasted for about an hour and a half: it was therefore between ten and eleven when she re-

turned to the lodgings. Zarah and I both saw by her countenance that her mission had been successful—at least so far as the exaction of a particular promise from St. Clair; though I had still my own secret misgivings whether he would fulfil it, or whether he might even yet, despite the terrible threat held out, discover some means of evading it.

"On reaching Captain St. Clair's house in the neigh-bourhood of the Regent's Park." began Beda. in explanation of her mission, "I learnt that he was at home. I was at once conducted into his presence; and I found that he was in a furious rage. He accosted me, his countenance white with passion; and he accused me of having aided in your escape, Zarah, from the lunatic asylum. I assumed a courageous demeanour: I even flung upon him a look of defiance; and I said significantly, 'Yes, Captain St. Clair: I performed my part in that transaction: and wheresoever I have an opportunity of frustrating schemes of villany, rest assured that I shall never hesitate to do my duty.—His countenance then suddenly underwent a complete change: it expresed a sinister confusion: his whole form trembled violently; and coming close up to me, he said in a low hoarse voice, 'Your words have a double meaning: you have told your mistress Ellen Percy everything that passed—But there he stopped suddenly short, as if struck by the idea that he was about to commit himself most unnecessarily and in a most insensate manner. I at once divined, however, into what allusion his guilty conscience had been about to betray him; and again fixing my eyes significantly upon his countenance, I said, 'Yes there is no need for me to conceal the fact! I *have* told Miss. Percy everything that took place between the old gipsy woman and myself at her cottage near Birmingham.'—Some vehement ejaculation expressive of rage burst from St. Clair's lips; and he began pacing to and fro in the apartment in an agitated manner.—'And you have done this," he said, at length stopping short, 'and you have been all the while a traitress; you have been playing false to those—' But then again he suddenly broke off, and with an imprecation levelled against himself for what he termed his folly in giving way to the impulse of the moment, he renewed his agitated walk. I was not in the least frightened: on the contrary, methought the more I could work upon his feelings and surround him with terrors, the better I could serve not only the purpose which I had in view on your behalf, Zarah—but likewise the better conduce to your own interests, Miss. Percy."

Both Zarah and myself flung approving glances upon the faithful girl; and she continued in the following manner:—

"When Captain St. Clair had made three or four turns in the room, I accosted him and said, "You may hence-forth tell those whom you choose to employ for your iniquitous aims, that they must not think to find an accomplice in the gipsy-girl Beda. Do you suppose that for a single instant I really intended to lend myself to the atrocious views and objects of that wretched old woman, who on the other hand is endeavouring to serve you only too well? I but seemed to give a willing ear to Dame Betty's ins-

tructions that I might fathom the depth of the fearful scheme. Rest assured, Captain St. Clair, that every fresh step which you take in your vindictive rancour or your measures of wicked expediency against Miss. Percy, will only tend to place you more completely in her power, and furnish her with an additional weapon to wield against you in case of necessity.—He listened in silence, but with a ghastly look and with a strange wicked expression of the eyes, it was dreadful to behold such a look upon such a handsome countenance I could not help thinking of the fallen angels of Scripture,—as you Miss. Percy, read of them one way to me, in Milton I think it was, showing how they preserve in some sense their celestial beauty, but with an expression borrowed from Pandemonium itself upon their features."

Beda paused for a few moments, as if still giving way to the same thoughts which she had just explained and illustrated; and then she continued in the following manner:—

"Captain St Clair made me no answer to my long speech: methought that he waited to hear whether I had anything more to say, so that he might ascertain to what extent his iniquities were known; and I fancied that it would be better for your interest Miss. Percy, to impress him with the idea that you were acquainted with every detail of his villanous conduct. I therefore went on to say, 'In me, Captain St. Clair, you behold one who is devoted heart and soul to the amiable and excellent mistress whom she is proud to serve, but whom you have thought fit to persecute. It was I who fathomed all your diabolical intentions, in which you were aided by Lady Lilla Essendine, with respect to the treacherously-contrived yacht: and so surely as you take each successive step in your iniquitous career, will heaven enable virtue and innocence to triumph over your machinations. You see that you can do nothing without being detected: your deep design in regard to that yacht was laid bare and yesterday you thought you had for ever removed Zarah, from your path; but that plot was likewise fathomed and has likewise been baffled. You are in the position of an enemy who is surrounded by spies, and who stands upon a mind which may explode at any instant.'—Thus I spoke to Captain St. Clair; and I saw that he quailed at my words, that the conviction of their truth was forced upon him, and that his guilty conscience was torturing him with a poignancy which was reflected in her countenance. Again he betook himself to his troubled walk: at every turn he flung upon me a glance which showed that he longed to question me, but that he dared not. At length he abruptly stopped short, and demanded, 'For what purpose do you come? or you a messenger from your mistress Miss. Percy? or are you for the nonce serving the views of your friend Zarah?'—'It is Zarah who has sent me,' I answered. 'You triumphed for a few hours; it is now her turn to triumph, and her conquest shall endure for a lifetime!'"

"Yes—you spoke well, Beda!" exclaimed Zarah. "And what did he say?"

"He folded his arms across his chest," continued Beda,—"I scarcely knew for an instant whether it were in actual bravado, or whether it were a movement

arising from the desperate feelings of one who saw that conditions which he dared not refuse where about to be presented to him as it were at the sword's point. But I quickly perceived that it was the latter: for when I told him, Zarah, precisely what you had bidden me say—when I repeated the words which you had put into my mouth his countenance became more ghastly than it was at first, his lips grew ashy, and they quivered perceptibly. I assured him that the lesson he had taught you by his treachery of last night, was not thrown away—that you had taken precautions which would defy all his ingenuity and all his artifice; for that you had committed to paper everything you knew concerning him, and you cared not whether others might be involved in his ruin if he were insensate enough to invoke that ruin upon his head.

"Oh, you spoke well! You executed your mission admirably!" exclaimed Zarah. "Proceed my dear Beda—proceed!"

"St. Clair muttered something to himself," continued Beda: "I did not exactly catch what it was—but methought it was to the effect that you Zarah, had borrowed a leaf out of Miss. Percy's book. I saw that he was terribly agitated, that he was shaken to the very innermost of his whole being, that he looked like a man who felt that the entire fabric of his schemes was crumbling around himself. I left him no time to recover his selfpossession: I knew that by dealing at him a quick succession of blows I should be best serving your interests. I therefore said, with as much impressiveness as possible, 'Zarah now insists that you shall fulfil to-morrow, at eleven in the forenoon, that which you have pledged yourself to accomplish to-day, and to evade which you perpetrated that tremendous treachery against her. Shortly before eleven to-morrow I shall be here to conduct you to her presence. And now understand me well, Captain St. Clair. If towards me to-morrow you attempt the slightest treachery—or if you fail, to obey Zarah's inandates, she will allow matters to take their course; and at noon punctually her friend will open the sealed packet confided to his keeping, and place the contents in the hands of the authorities. One word alone can save you; and Zarah's lips only can pronounce that word. It will rest with yourself whether this word shall be spoken by those lips ere the hour of noon to-morrow?'—Captain St. Clair listened to me with a continued ghastliness of countenance; and when I had finished speaking, he still remained gazing upon me for some moments longer, as if he were under the influence of an awful consternation and dismay. Then he slowly turned round, advanced to the mantel, and stood there for some minutes, with his back towards me. He seemed to forget that the mirror reflected his countenance, and that all the hideous horrible feelings which were then conflicting in his soul, were indicated upon his features. At last he turned abruptly away from the mantel: and accosting me again, he said in a deep hollow voice, 'Beda, it shall be done. But for heaven's sake tell Zarah to do nothing rash: tell her that inasmuch as there will be certain preparations to make to-morrow morning—a licence to procure—a clergyman to have in readiness—I may not be enabled to keep so closely to the time as she arbitra-

rily expects. Yet I swear that her wishes shall now be fulfilled; and as a proof of my sincerity, you may tell her also that I confess myself vanquished. When Edwin St. Clair makes such an admission as this, it is that he only feels too keenly that which truth constrains him to avow,'— 'For your own sake, Captain St. Clair,' I answered, 'I would indeed counsel you to attend to Zarah's mandates; for she is resolute; and the friend to whose hands she has consigned the papers is not a man who will neglect the instructions that have been given him.'— Having thus spoken, I turned quickly away, and glided from the room: but I lingered alike on the land and on the stairs, in order to ascertain whether Captain St. Clair took any steps to have me followed so as to discover my destination on leaving the house. The precaution was however unnecessary: the door did not open —no bell rang. I issued forth from the dwelling: and I made the best of my way hither. I feel convinced, Zarah," added Beda emphatically, "that Captain St. Clair is a man who is completely beaten: he feels it—he knows it; and at eleven to-morrow you will behold him here."

"Such also is my opinion," I said, "after everything I have heard:"—for my misgiving, had now entirely vanished.

Both Zarah and myself complimented Beda upon the manner in which she had acquitted herself of the mission entrusted to her; and the faithful girl was rejoiced at thus deserving our commendations. I determined upon leaving Beda with Zarah for the night; so that in case any mischief should happen to the latter, the former would be enabled to bring me the intelligence with the least possible delay—though I looked upon the precaution as barely necessary; for Beda's narrative had proved how St. Clair was discomfited, and I felt convinced that he must know the gipsy nature of Zarah too well to suppose that she would on the present occasion leave herself open to be assiled on any vulnerable point. I took my leave and returned to Hunter Street. The normans fancied I had been making a variety of calls amongst any acquaintances at the West End;—and in respect to Beda I had already accounted for her absence from the house by stating that I had given her a holiday to enable her to visit a respectable female whom she knew. It was a long time that night ere slumber visited my eyes: for I was kept awake by my reflections on all that had passed during the day, as well as by a certain degree of suspense and anxiety which I experienced as to what might probably be the termination of the important matter in store for the morrow. The morning's post brought me a very kind and courteous letter from the Countess of Carshalton, requesting me to call at the mansion at my earliest convenience, as the Earl had some communication to make. Although the object was not specified, yet I felt convinced from the tone of the billet itself, that my hope was about to receive its fulfilment and that the pardon of my father had been awarded. I was therefore all anxiety to proceed to Carshalton House; and I should even have set off immediately after breakfast, were it not necessary to await the return of Beda in order to ascertain how matters had progressed at Zarah's lodgings.

It was about half-past twelve

o'clock, when, being in my own chamber, I heard Beda's light footsteps rapidly ascending the stairs; and my heart palpitated violently; for she might be the bearer of good or of evil intelligence—Zarah might have triumphed, or Edwin St. Clair might have prepetrated some fresh wickedness. The door opened—Beda bounded in—all my anxiety and suspense were dispelled in a moment; for I saw by the expression of her contenance that everything was favourable!

"It is done!" exclaimed Beda; "and the gipsy Zarah is the wife of the brilliant Edwin St. Clair!"

"Is it possible?" I cried, still scarcely able to realize that which appeared to be invested with all the fantastic wildness of a dream.

"My dear miss, it is as I tell you!" responded Beda, her large dark eyes being luminous with triumphant joy, and her lips wreathing with smiles above her pearly teeth. "I myself beheld the ceremony!—it is accomplished!—our gipsy friend is St. Clair's bride—and he has borne her to his home!"

"It is marvellous, Beda!" I said: "it transcends all the wonders of the most imaginative and preposterous romance! That so wild a scheme as Zarah's could have succeeded—that she whom but comparatively a short time back, I behold barefooted in the neighbourhood of Lady Lilla Essendine's villa—should have succeeded in raising herself to the position of a rich and distinguished man's wife, is something to which the mind almost refuses its faith, notwithstanding knows it to be true!"

"And it is true!" rejoined Beda "But the result has astonished me most of all for I expected when the ceremony was over, that Captain St. Clair would walk away scornfully and contemtuously the bride behind him; whereas—"

"Tell me every detail, Beda!" I interrupted her. "Begin from the commencement! You know how much I am interested in all those circumstances."

"The night passed," said Beda, "without any incident to threaten Zarah's safety or security. At half-past ten o'clock this forenoon, I issued from her lodgings, and bent my way to Captain St. Clair's house in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. I was informed that he had gone out at an early hour in the morning—but that he had left a message to the effect that if I should call before his return, I was to wait for him. Soon after eleven o'clock he entered the room to which I had been shown. I saw that he was exceedingly pale—that he had a very haggard and careworn look—and that his eyes were somewhat inflamed—indeed that there was every indication of his having passed a sleepless night. He closed the door, advanced straight up to me, and said in a low voice and with a forced composure. 'I, have kept my word in every respect up to his point: but am I positively to suppose that Zarah is serious in her intentions, and that there are no possible conditions to which she will listen?'—'Her resolve in fixed,' I answered; 'and you can offer nothing to which she will assent.'—He remained silent for a few moments, during which his face seemed to become ghastlier, and his lips, ashy white, quivered till he suddenly bit them as if to restrain their tremulousness. Then he said, as if acting under an abrupt

impulse, while he grasped my wrist so tightly that the fingers which closed upon it appeared to be made of iron, 'A thousand guineas, Beda, for you, if you will tell me who is this faithful friend of hers to whose hands she has confided the sealed packet of which you spoke to me last night?'—I shook my head resolutely.—'By heaven, you know and you must tell me! he exclaimed, as if maddened and goaded to desperation.—Again I shook my head, my looks quailing not before him.—'Beda,' he resumed, 'I said a thousand guineas: I will double the sum if you will consent to serve me in this instance! I will moreover take you to a jeweller's, where you shall select for yourself the costliest gems; I will give you the richest wardrobe that gold can purchase; I will furnish a house for you in the most sumptuous manner; I will make a lady of you; and I will for ever be your friend!'—But for the third think I shook my head; and never shall I forget how ghastly was the look of disappointment which seized upon the countenance of Captain St. Clair. My dear Miss. Percy, if I have told you all these things which to such an extent regard myself, it is for no purpose of making a parade of my refusal of the temptations held out, but simply in obedience to your mandate that I should acquiaint you with everything."

"Yes, Beda—omit not a single detail!" I said; "tell me all that passed!"

"Captain St. Clair perceived that I was resolute in resisting his offers," pursued the faithful girl: "and after a few moments of speechless agony on his part—for such I saw that it was—he appeared by an effort to regain a forced and cold composure—but, Oh! how unnatural!—'Come," he said; 'conduct me to the place where Zarah awaits us.'—He was then moving towards the door; but suddenly recollecting something, he stopped short, and said in a low, deep tone. 'Beda in the presence of those who are to assist at the ceremony, it is not necessary that it should appear as if I were yielding to coercoin.'—'Not a syllable will escape my lips, to convey such an impression,' I answered; 'and I can assure you, Captain St. Clair, that Zarah's demeanour will be regulated to the standard of your own.'—He said not another word, but issued from the room. I followed him; and on passing out of the house, I saw a cab standing in the street. It was not his own cabriolet: it was an ordinary public vehicle.—'Now give your instructions to the driver,' he whispered to me, 'and let us proceed to our destination.'—I told the man whither to take us; and on entering the cab, I found two persons already seated therein. These were a clergyman and his clerk. St. Clair took his place in the vehicle, which immediately drove away. For some minutes not a word was spoken: but I noticed that the reverend gentleman and his clerk contemplated me with interest and attention. Captain St. Clair at length began to discourse in a cheerful tone with the clergyman: but, adopt though he be at dissimulation, he could not possibly on that occasion deceive others as to the real state of his feelings. No doubt the minister and the clerk must have suspected that there was something strange in the proceeding for which their services were enlisted: but it was not for them to offer any com-

ment. The cab reached its destination: and we all alighted. I led the way up to the sitting-room where Zarah awaited us; and immediately on crossing the threshold, Captain St. Clair advanced towards Zarah, whose hand he took; and he breathed a few words in her ear. I have had no opportunity of learning what they were: but I have no doubt that they were to the same effect as the injunction which he had given to me—namely that it was not to appear as if he were acting under coercion. The demeanour of Zarah was perfectly collected and composed; and not once throughout the ceremony—no, nor even at its termination—could the slightest expression of ungenerous triumph be discerned in her looks. I should observe that she was dressed with neatness but elegance—with no indication of the bridal costume,—no white veil, no orange-blossoms! The ceremony progressed; and though St. Clair's cheeks continued very pale, yet his demeanour was composed and serious, as was fitting for the solemn occasion. That ceremony terminated: the certificate was duly signed—Zarah took possession of it—the minister and his clerk withdrew. I was then all suspense and anxiety. I more than half expected that St. Clair would turn round upon his bride, tell her that her ambition was now gratified, and that their pathways in the world thenceforth lay in different directions. As for Zarah herself, her demeanour was that of a calm dignity, whatever her inward feelings might have been. There was a silence of perhaps a minute, but certainly not more, after the minister and the clerk had withdrawn; and then St. Clair said, with a voice of cold politeness, 'Madam, I am prepared to conduct you to your future home. It is not my fault if the preparations have been so hurried, and indeed have been of such a nature as to render it inconvenient for a better equipage to be in attendance than that which is now waiting at the door. I presume that his young female,' he added, alluding to me, 'has your instructions in reference to a certain matter to which I need not more particularly refer,'—'Yes,' responded Zarah; 'this faithful girl will procure the packet from the hands of the friend to whom it has been consigned; and she will commit it to the flames. You may rely upon her.'—'I know that she is perfectly trust-worthy,' remarked Captain St. Clair; and methought there was a slight tincture of bitterness in his tone beneath its glacial surface, as if he remembered how signally he failed in his endeavours to bribe and tempt me. Zarah hastened to embrace me in a most fervid manner: she then accepted the arm which her husband with cold politeness offered her; and they descended from the room. He handed her into the vehicle, which immediately drove away in the direction of the Regent's Park. I watched its departure from the window; and then I also left the lodging-house —with difficulty however escaping from the torrent of questions overwhelmingly put by the landlady and the servant-maid, who intercepted me in the passage. And thus, my dear Miss. Percy, all is accomplished! The once obscure gipsy is now the bride of Edwin St. Clair! I need not add that the parting mission which was confided to me—of

seeking the faithful friend to procure the restitution of the packet, and to commit it to the flames—was a mere fiction, on such packet having been confided to any such friend at all!"

"There is only one thing which I could have wished to have been differently managed," I remarked, as all the perfidy which had been accomplished by Lord Frederick Ravenscliffe towards Juliet Norman came up into my mind. "I should be better satisfied if some proof had been afforded that the clergyman was really what he represented himself to be."

"Oh, my dear miss," exclaimed Beda, delighted at being enabled to ease my mind on that point, "there can be no doubt that the minister who officiated was really the Reverend Mr. Calvert of Saint—parish: for amidst the multitudinous questions with which the landlady of the house sought to overwhelm me, she mentioned that gentleman's name. She had recognised both him and his clerk as they were taking their leave."

"I am indeed rejoiced to hear this statement, Beda," I observed. "And now may heaven so rule Zarah's destiny that she shall never repent the step which she has this day taken!"

The same wish was echoed by Beda,—and I then proceeded to the mansion of the Earl and Countess of Carshalton.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE PARDON.

On arriving at Carshalton House, I was at once introduced into the presence of the Earl and Countess, who received me with kindest welcome; and I saw by their looks that the hope which I had formed was not destined to be deceived, but that they had agreeable intelligence for me. The Countess almost immediately began by giving me the assurance that the secrect of my birth had been faithfully kept, and that not even to any member of their family had they mentioned the fact that I was the daughter of the delinquent clergyman.

"And here," said the Earl of Carshalton, producing a sealed packet of official shape and dimensions, "is your father's pardon."

A strange wild feeling of joy seized upon my heart at that moment: I sank upon my knees—with both my hands did I clasp the hand which proferred me that precious document: but the Earl raised me up, and the Countess kissed me on both cheeks.

"You know not, my dear Miss. Percy," she said, "the pleasure which his lordship and myself experience in being enabled to render you this little service. It is a free pardon, without any specific condition contained therein: but remember, it has been granted on the understanding that the affair is to be kept as secret as possible. It is an unpleasant subject to dwell upon," continued her ladyship; "but still it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with certain particulars. His lordship had perhaps better explain them."

"The explanations can be speedily given," said the Earl. "Suppose, Miss. Percy, for example's sake, any individual recognising your father in England, and having a spite against him, should see to hand him over into the custody of the law's officers—the production of that document

would prove sufficient to induce any constable or other authority to decline interference in the matter."

"Then, heaven be thanked!" I said, while tears of joy rolled down my cheeks, "my father may once again tread the soil of his native land without apprehension of danger!"

With a heart full of emotion I poured forth the expressions of my gratitude for the immensity of the favour thus bestowed upon me: but the Earl and Countless declared that they should still always esteem themselves my debtors.

"There is now another thing in referenee to which I must speak," said the Earl of Carshalton. "Neither the Countess nor myself have forgotten the interesting circumstance that your attendant, Beda Robinson, is the daughter of those worthy gipsies who restored our own child to our arms, and who thus relieved our minds from an excruciating sence of agony. Beda's parents were wont to receive an annuity of twenty pounds a year: I have instructed my broker to place a thousand pounds in the funds to the name of Beda Robinson, under the trusteeship of yourself, Miss. Percy. Here is the document;—and now, at any time when you may be desirous of bestowing some little reward upon the young girl for her fidelity in respect to yourself, you can communicate the fact that she is not altogether without a provision for her future welfare."

On Beda's behalf I thanked the Earl and Countess for this proof of a generosity which was bestowed in so delicate a manner; and I promised to fulfil to the best of my discretion the trust that had been reposed in me. On taking my leave of the Earl and Countess, I returned to Hunter Street: but on my way hither, I resolved to nothing for the present to Beda in respect to her good fortune. Not that I feared she would become elate to an extent that would effect any change in her general good conduct; but I saw that an attachment had sprung up between herself and William Lardner—and being deeply interested in Beda's welfare, I did not wish her to think of marrying for several years to come, so that both herself and her intended husband might in the meantime have well profited by their experiences of the world. When the time should arrive that they might consistently with prudence an discretion contract the solemn engagement, it would be a happy thing for them to learn that there was in store for them a competency beyond whatsoever they might in the meanwhile have earned by their own industry and good behaviour; and therefore, as I knew that a young couple are only too apt to precipitate their marriage when possessing a little fortune, I deemed it in every sense better for Beda's interests that for the present she should continue in ignorance of the Earl of Carshalton's bounty towards her. She was now only a little past fifteen; and some few years might yet be allowed to elapse before she began to think of settling herself in marriage.

Immediately on reaching Hunter Street, I lost no time in sitting down to write a letter to my father, requesting him at once to come over to England, as I had intelligence of the greatest importance to communicate. I did not choose to entrust the real facts to a letter,

which by the possibilities of miscarriage or mislaying might fall under the eyes of strangers and thus reveal the fact that under the name of Mr. Croft the identity of Mr. Percy was concealed: and besides, it may be easily understood that I experienced a filial desire of communicating with my own lips the happy intelligence, and enjoying the effect that it might produce at the time. I mentioned in my letter how immediately on his arrival in England he might communicate with me under circumstances of secrecy. By the same post I wrote to Mrs. Oldcastle, to make her aware of the pleasing change which had taken place in my father's position: but I was so careful and cautious in wording the epistle that though *she* would understand the meaning I wished to convey; it would nevertheless remain unintelligible to any stranger unacquainted with previous circumstances.

Three or four days passed; and during this interval I learnt that the whole town was astonished at what was regarded as "the extraordinary marriage" of Captain St. Clair. It proved the subject of a paragraph in the newspapers, under the head of "A Romance of Real Life;" and was dished up with all the art of the literary purveyor for the public appetite. It represented "that Captain St. Clair, the Honourable Member for—, having some time back in his travels through England been struck by the extraordinary beauty of a wandering gipsy, was led to make inquiries concerning her; and he found that her character was irreproachable. Being a gentleman," continued the penny-a-liner's dscription, "who has always manifested an exceedingly bold independence of spirit and a lofty scorn for society's fastidious conventionalisms, Captain St. Clair resolved to consult his own happiness on a point in which it had become so deeply involved. He therefore intimated to the handsome gipsy that if she would qualify herself to become his wife, he would confer upon her that sacred and honourable title. It may easily be supposed that the offer was not declined; and the handsome Zarah, being brought up to London under circumstances which proved Captain St. Clair's honourable intentions and noble-minded delicacy of conduct, was placed in a respectable family, where preceptors and governesses were provided for her tuition. The heroine of this romance of real life made rapid progress; and her natural intelligence enabled her not merely to attain a rare degree of perfection in all the usual branches of education, but likewise to endow herself with many brilliant accomplishments and to acquire the most lady-like refinement of manners. We believe that we may on authority assert that during this interval of mental training, Captain St. Clair forbore altogether from visiting the beautiful gipsy, so that there should not be the slightest scope for the whisperings of scandal in respect to her whom he intended to make his wife. At length the happy day arrived; and the marriage has been solemnized under circumstances of privacy, but to the joy and delight of the happy couple who are the hero and heroine of this strange yet truthful romance."

In such a style was the newspaper-paragraph worded; and the moment I read it, I felt convinced that its instigator, if not its actual author, was none other than Edwin St. Clair himself. From

ELLEN PERCY

OR

THE MEMOIRS OF AN ACTRESS

BY

G. W. M. REYNOLDS

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